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January 24, 1893.

No. 809.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXII.

DON DANTON, THE GENT FROM DENVER.

BY KING KEENE, of the U. S. Secret Service Corps.



THERE STOOD THE REAL DON DANTON, PRINCE OF DETECTIVES, TO CONFRONT THE DARING IMPOSTOR!

Don Danton,

THE GENT FROM DENVER;

OR,

The Kick-up at Kickapoo.

BY KING KEENE,

Of the U. S. Secret Service Corps.

CHAPTER I.

CONGENIAL COMPANIONS.

THE regular stage between Wainwright and Kickapoo was lumbering leisurely along in the direction of the place last named.

It was the afternoon of a pleasant day, and the passengers on top were enjoying the ride to the full—the little enjoyment that can be found in that mode of traveling.

On the box with the driver was a rather dandified individual, perhaps thirty years of age. He was clad in the finest, from a silk "stovepipe" above to a pair of patent-leather boots below, with everything else about him in keeping with these.

He was good-looking, with a dashing, daredevil air, and smoked cigars which expressed their excellent quality in every whiff. He had favored the Jehu with one of his "weeds," and that competent judge of a good thing had declared it was "right up in high G."

On the top proper were four others, who had been whiling away the time playing at eucher. One of these was a young man of twenty-five, clad in a business suit of ordinary cut and texture. Another was a miner, judging by his dress and general appearance—a man of thirty-five, maybe, who answered to the name of Tom Trump.

The other two, like Mr. Trump, were ordinary "citizens"—miners, teamsters, or something in that line.

"Thar!" presently exclaimed Tom Trump, as he lost another trick and the game ended, "I'm done. I have had enough fer this yer' time."

"Not going to back out, are you?" asked the young man, as he took in the trifle of money staked, he having won this game. "It is just getting interesting."

"Yas, I'm done," Mr. Trump iterated. "My pocket might stand et all right, but my 'back won't, and I reckon I'll stretch out hyer and take a smoke; that is ter say, ef our friend thar in front won't 'bjeet ter my minglin' common smoke wi' his pure blue artekel."

The dandy on the box glanced around with a smile.

"I can fix matters so you will not have to impair the smoke," he said. "Try one of mine and see how you like it. Pass the case along to the others. Take one, boys, and we'll all smoke together, now that you are tired of playing. I think you'll say they are good enough for a prince. Here, driver, take another."

He had passed his case to Mr. Trump as he spoke; it went around and each man took a cigar from it; and when it was returned to the owner he offered it to the driver with his closing words.

The driver having had one before, was not slow to take another; and in a few minutes all were puffing away with great gusto and the stage was leaving a line of smoke behind that seemed loth to depart from the trail.

"Well, how are they?" the dandy inquired.

"Excellent, sir," answered the young man.

"That hits 'em," cried Mr. Trump. "They're dainty, like yerself, pardner."

The other two and the driver had words of praise to offer, and the giver seemed much gratified.

After a few minutes of silence the young man observed:

"Seems to me we are rather distant for fellow travelers all bound for the same place. Suppose we scrape acquaintance all around. All smoking the same cigars, we ought to be congenial, hale fellows well met, you know."

"Reckon I've given ye my handle already," spoke up Tom Trump. "Ye see me fer jest what I am; no better, no worse. So nethin' of a miner in my way, and jest now bound fer ther camp of Kickapoo in hopes of strikin' a job in some of the mines thar. That's my tally straight out."

"My name," the young man then spoke up, "is Howard Royland, and I hail from Denver. I am a mining expert and assayer, and I am going to Kickapoo to pass judgment on a mine called the Wonder, which has been offered for sale at Denver, and which a party of capitalists

think of buying, provided it is found to be as represented. I shall soon determine that for them, when I see the property and what it turns out."

The other two on top gave their names and stated their business, and that narrowed it down to the dandy on the box.

"Don't feel forced to chip in unless you want to, sir," responded the mining expert.

"Oh, I'm seldom forced to do anything," was the rejoinder. "As I am not traveling incog., I will tell you just who and what I am. Our friend Trump here has come very near to mentioning my name already; or, if not my name, my handy appellation."

"Me?" questioned the miner, in some surprise. "How hev I come nigh ter mentionin' yer handle, pard?"

"Why, did you not tell me my cigar was a dainty, like myself?"

"Yas; I b'lieve I did say somethin' er that effect; but, how does that come close to yer name?"

"I will explain. My name, gentlemen, is Don Danton, but I am better known as Delicate Don. You see, Mr. Trump, when you called me dainty you were not far off the track, dainty and delicate being akin."

"Delicate Don?" echoed Royland. "Not Don Danton, the detective?"

Tom Trump and the other two, with the driver, were all attention, and evidently full of interest at this disclosure, as the name was recognized instantly, for Don Danton, familiarly called "Delicate Don," owing to his dainty elegance in matters of dress and manners, was widely known by reputation as a fearless and successful detective.

"The same," the man on the box assured. "I am going down to Kickapoo to take possession of a mine, to which I hold a proprietary right, by power of attorney given me by the owner before he died. I shall take possession peaceably if I can, but I will fight for it if I have to do so. When Delicate Don takes hold of a thing he doesn't do it by halves, you may be sure of that."

CHAPTER II.

DANTON EXPLAINS FURTHER.

THE driver, Tom Trump, and the others looked upon the man with something akin to wonder and admiration, an attention which he seemed rather to enjoy.

"Ye don't really mean ter say that you are Don Danton, do ye?" Tom Trump demanded, as though he could not believe it. "Are ye, now, sure 'nough, and no jokin' about et?"

The dandy laughed pleasantly.

"I have given it to you straight," he declared. "I'm the real Donald, sure enough. I take it that you have heard of me, all of you. As I said before, I am not traveling incog.—that is, in disguise—and there is no reason why I shouldn't make myself known. Somebody would be sure to recognize me, I opine."

"Durn me ef this hyar ain't a red-letter day to me!" cried the driver. "Who would 'a' thort et? So you are ther chap what scooped ther durndest outlaw in ther hull West, are ye? This is an honor I never dreamed of havin', this is; and tickle me with a club ef I ain't ez proud as ary peacock with his tail spread. Goin' to Kickapoo to take a mine, hey?"

"That is the business that is calling me there."

"Mought a feller inquire what mine et ar?"

"It is called the Little Sweetheart, I believe."

"Ther Leetle Sweetheart? Why, that's Job Letson's mine! Ye don't mean ter say Job is dead, do ye?"

"That was the name of the man who transferred the property to me, and he is dead, sure enough. You knew him, then, did you?"

"Know Job Letson? I should remark that I did, pardner! Pore Lamia; she will be jest nigh about killed by this hyar news. Et's too bad, darn me ef et ain't."

"Lamia? That's Job's daughter, is it not?"

"Yas; and a finer gal never drewed breath, as you'll have ter say when ye see her."

"I suppose she will take it rather hard, poor child. I must break the news to her as gently as I can. How old is she?"

"She must be crowdin' twenty purty close, I should think. She's jest a daisy, and ther best-lookin' gal thar is in all Kickapoo, an' in all this kentry, fer that matter. But, when did Job die?"

"It is several days ago, now."

"Pore feller! I was afeerd his fall would settle him."

"What do you know about this mine, the Little Sweetheart? Is it a good one?"

"It is as good as ther best of 'em thar at Kickapoo; and that is sayin' a good deal, too, fer some of 'em are prime, up to ther very tail-in's."

"And what do you know about the Wonder?" here put in the young man, Royland.

"I'll leave you ter judge of that fer yerself, seein' as you are a expert on mines," was the driver's evasive response.

"Is the Sweetheart running?" asked Delicate Don.

"Yes, et is workin'," the driver answered to that.

"And who is managing it?"

"A man named Woolfe Nathan."

"What manner of man is he? No harm to ask, since I am likely to have dealings with him."

"Wull, he is ruther a tony feller, about your own age, I should say. Ruther struck with a notion fer Job's gal, I take et."

"That is the situation, eh? I understood from Job that he did not think and too well of this man Nathan; one reason why he urged me to take the mine in charge, you see."

"Et may be all right, but I'm of the mind that you will have trouble in gettin' Woolfe Nathan out. Et will be a good deal as ther gal says, of course, though, and I'm ruther of ther 'pinion that she don't keer fer him."

"It will be as I determine," the detective declared. "I have the right, and I'm going to possess that mine if I have to fight for it, as I said before. The girl's interest and mine are at stake in the matter, you see. I'm to work it on shares, giving the girl half, or sell it if I think best, for our mutual interests."

"Wull, I hope thar ain't no trouble, but I'm afeerd thar will be."

"Et hits me," here spoke up Tom Trump, "that this is about as good a time as any ter 'ply fer a job."

Danton turned and looked at him for a moment.

"Do you mean that you want to engage with me?" he asked.

"I'm bound fer Kickapoo lookin' fer work, as I've said afore, and may as well work fer you as anybody, if the pay is all hunky."

"Did I understand you to say you understand mining pretty well? Do you think you could fill the post of assistant-superintendent?"

"I'd like ther chance ter try et, boss. I have had experience in that line, and I think I kin fill ther bill. Ef I don't, after a try, why it's easy ter dispose of me. I'll git up and git at a wink."

"Well, consider yourself engaged, then. As soon as I get possession of the mine I'll settle with you regarding your pay."

"That suits me first rate. I'm with ye, and I guess we kin yank ther mine, ef you hold ther solid papers as ye say."

"And I do. Having engaged you, I shall expect your assistance in securing my rights if it comes to a rustle."

"I'll back ye, you kin bet! Ther driver hyer says this is his red-letter day, I reckon et's mine, too."

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL AT KICKAPOO.

THE camp of Kickapoo was a thriving place. It was in the bloom of youth and vigor, so to say, and was enjoying a boom.

Rich silver lodes had been discovered there, and no less than half a dozen shafts, drifts and levels were in active operation.

Capitalists had their eyes upon the place, and three of the mines had been brought up and were being worked as company concerns. One other was now for sale.

The other two were still held by the original owners, and one of these was the "Little Sweetheart," of which something has been made known in the foregoing chapters. This mine ranked second to none in one output and high assay.

Job Letson, the owner of the "Sweetheart," had been among the first discoverers, and being a man of large experience in mining matters, had staked his claim where he knew a paying lode was a certainty. And he had made no mistake, as the richness of the mine proved.

Several offers had been made for this locate, all of which had been refused, for Job knew he could command a better price later on, if he wanted to sell out, of which he was as yet uncertain. He managed the mine himself, with the help of an assistant, the Woolfe Nathan of whom mention has been made, and it was now paying big returns, and the "showing" growing better all the time.

Some time prior to our story, Job Letson had met with a serious accident at the mine.

Through some mishap he had fallen down the shaft and had narrowly escaped being killed outright. As it was, he was badly broken and bruised, and for weeks his life hung in the balance. During that time Nathan managed the property for him. Finally Job began to mend, but it was found that he would have to go to Denver for treatment and perhaps to have a surgical operation performed.

He went, placing Nathan in full charge, and leaving his daughter, Lamia, at Kickapoo as a sort of general supervisor until his return. Letters had been received from him, each one telling of improvement in his condition, and the daughter was beginning to look forward to the time of his return.

For several days just preceding the time of our story, however, nothing had been heard from him, and Lamia was full of anxiety concerning him. And now, as we have seen, a stranger was bearing to her the sad news of her father's death.

But further concerning the camp and mine center.

It was almost a young city in point of population, though as yet only an infant in days.

It had two or three hotels, many saloons, of course, and a large number of shanties of a temporary sort that had hastily been put up.

Besides these there were a few buildings of the substantial sort, particularly the offices belonging to the company mines. Some cottages had been built and others were in process of construction.

Land value was increasing every day, and there was every prospect that the camp would soon pass through its embryo stage and become a neat and pretty village in the near future. Hence those who had claims and were holding fast to them were considered wise.

The leading hotel was the "Merry Monarch," owned and conducted by one Henry Bridgell, familiarly spoken of as "Hen Low." This was the largest of the three, and the best, and was located in the center of the camp. Opposite to it was the chief saloon, the "Best Hand." Near this was the Post-office and other important adjuncts to a well regulated town.

This was the business center, and here, about stage-time on this day of which we write, a crowd was congregated.

Presently the Wainwright "hearse," as the stage was called, came in sight up the valley, bringing with it a cloud of dust as the driver was putting his team to a little spurt of speed to come into town in style.

The word was quickly passed that the stage was coming, the crowd was speedily enlarged by an outpouring from the hotels, saloons, stores, etc., and by the time the ramshackle old vehicle came clattering up to the Merry Monarch, where it stopped, it looked as though the whole camp was out.

"Hillo, boyees, hyer we are again!" sung out the driver, as he flung the lines from his left and right at once. "Hyer we are, and every wheel with me. And, boyees, I brought a passenger this time that ye orter be proud of. Hyar's ther great outlaw-ketcher, Mister Don Danton. This is ther gent, hyar on ther box, and ther man what don't use him white has got ter lick me! You hear that chatter?"

There was great excitement in a moment. Don Danton at Kickapoo?

Delicate Don's deeds had been heard of there, and everybody pressed forward to get a look at the noted detective.

On the piazza of the hotel were two young men who exchanged a glance at mention of the name, and coolly surveyed the smiling, confident dandy, as he got down from the stage-box.

These two were Woolfe Nathan and one Austin Brett. The former has been introduced; the latter was manager of the mine that was for sale, the "Wonder." Both were well dressed, and had something of the air of sports about them. They were smoking, and appeared to have been in conversation.

The driver had got down immediately after making his announcement, and Delicate Don did likewise, to be followed in turn by Tom Trump, Howard Royland, and the other two top passengers. There were passengers inside, too, who were clambering out at the same moment. The crowd was pressing closer, eager to see the noted detective, and it was with some effort that he and the others reached the steps to the piazza.

Don Danton's name was being called, louder and louder each moment, and when he reached the piazza he turned and lifted his hat to the crowd, a flush of something suspiciously like pride appearing upon his face as he did so.

Here he was, a stranger, yet one whose name was well known, and the crowd was ready to

worship him as the hero of whom they had heard so many deeds of valor.

But a bow would not suffice, as he found; he must speak.

"Well, gentlemen of Kickapoo," he remarked, removing his hat, "it appears the driver has got me into something of a fix by telling who I am. I greet you one and all. I am not here on detective business, as I may as well state at once, but upon a mission of altogether a different sort."

Replacing his hat he stepped back, and as he entered the bar-room of the hotel a rousing cheer went up from the crowd without.

The driver had handed out the mail, and now a good portion of the crowd went off in the direction of the post-office, but more crowded into the bar-room of the Merry Monarch.

Little or no attention was shown to any of the other passengers, Danton's name having eclipsed them, as it were; they, therefore, entered the hotel almost unnoticed, while the driver got out his Express and other stuff, and doing up the lines, led his caravan away.

Woolfe Nathan and Austin Brett had stepped into the bar-room after Danton, and stood in the background watching him while he registered.

He seemed to have some interest for them, whatever it might be, but that did not appear yet. They exchanged remarks in low tones as they watched him.

Tom Trump registered next after Detective Danton, and then followed the young man and the others in order—such of the passengers as sought entertainment at that establishment.

About the time the last one registered, it having taken some little time for the slow-going landlord to serve each his turn, the whole room was startled by a wild scream out on the street in front, and instantly a rush was made for the door.

CHAPTER IV.

DANTON'S BUSINESS MADE KNOWN.

ON the ground, in front of the hotel, lay a young woman.

She was lying on her side, and in one hand she held an opened letter. So they found her.

"Why, et's Job Letson's gal!" cried the first man out of the bar-room after the scream. "Et's Lamia Letson!"

Woolfe Nathan, Austin Brett, Delicate Don and others were following the crowd out, and at mention of this name they pushed forward with more interest.

Already a group of men had gathered around the girl, but as yet no one had offered to touch her. They seemed to stand in awe, as if fearful that some terrible crime had been done.

"Stand aside!" ordered Woolfe Nathan, pushing through the crowd.

Way was made for him, and he and Brett hastened to the girl and lifted her up, and bore her to the piazza.

As they did this the letter fell from her nerveless fingers. It was picked up by Tom Trump, who glanced at its contents.

"What have you there?" asked Delicate Don.

"Ther letter what ther gal had in her hand," Tom answered.

"Let me see it."

Tom surrendered it promptly.

Delicate Don read it there and then, after which he pushed forward to where the young woman had been laid.

Nathan was rubbing her hands, trying to bring her to, while Brett was wiping her forehead, with the same purpose in view.

"I wonder what can have caused it?" Brett was querying.

"Ha!" exclaimed Nathan, "that reminds me. Where is the letter she had in her hand?"

"It is right here, sir," spoke up Delicate Don, extending it. "I think this explains the cause of the young lady's fainting."

"You have read it then, sir?"

"I have."

"By what right did you presume to do that?"

"I did not stop to weigh my right," was the curt retort. "Had I done so, no doubt I should have found that it overtops yours."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You will learn before long, sir."

Nathan glared at the man for a moment, but did not press the question further just then.

Having taken the letter, he proceeded to read it, while Brett continued his exertions with the young woman to bring her to.

"Heavens!" Nathan ejaculated, as he read, "Job Letson dead!"

"Dead?" echoed Brett. And the crowd voiced the same exclamation. It was a shocking piece of news.

"No wonder the poor girl fainted," remarked

Nathan. "This is awful news. It is too bad that it could not have reached her in some more gentle manner."

He read on, and another exclamation escaped him.

"Thunder!" he this time broke out; and turning, he glared at Delicate Don.

"You see how it is," observed Don, quietly.

"I thought I was the only bearer of the sad news, but it seems the mail got ahead of me."

"Then it is true—"

"It is true that I hold power of attorney from Job Letson, and that all his interests here must be surrendered to me!"

The crowd listened in amazement.

"Read ther letter, Mister Nathan," one man called out. "Let's all hear what et has ter say."

This demand was urged with such force that Nathan had to comply, and opening the sheet, having folded it, he read it aloud as follows:

"DENVER, COL., —, 18—.

"TO MISS LAMIA LETSON, at Camp Kickapoo, Col.:

"DEAR MISS:—It is with much pain and great sympathy that we are obliged to announce to you the death of your father, which occurred on the 10th. Knowing that it would be impossible, owing to distance, for you to get here, he has been buried with every attention and without regard to expense. Before death he made Mr. Donald Danton his legal proprietary attorney. This gentleman will be at your place very shortly, with full power to act.

"Yours in deep sympathy,

"DRS. WEED & RYDALL."

Just as Nathan finished reading, the young woman began to show signs of coming to, and thrusting the letter into his pocket he again lent assistance to Brett to complete her restoration.

Presently she opened her eyes, and for a few moments gazed wonderingly at the many faces about her.

Suddenly it came back to her, the terrible news, and with another cry she became again unconscious. It was more than she could bear.

By this time half the camp was gathered before the hotel, many women being in the crowd, and it was now that one of these made the suggestion that the young lady be carried home.

No one seemed to have thought of this.

"It is the best thing to be done, before she comes to again," said Nathan.

With a motion to Brett, the two lifted her, and commanding the crowd to fall back, carried her off and away.

"Et's ruther rough on ther pooty gal, and no mistake," remarked the miner, Tom Trump, speaking to Delicate Don, now his employer.

"You are right it is," Don agreed. "I had half a mind to go along with them, but it would look too much like forcing my claim at a wrong time. I am a stranger to the young lady, you see."

"Yas, that's so. While we are talkin' about et, Mister Danton, and afore we go any further with this hyar business, thar's one p'int that I want to be set right on, seein' that now I am in your service. Let's step away where we kin have jest a few words in private."

"Why, certainly, Tom," was the response. "We'll go up to my room, for we have no call to remain here."

The crowd was already beginning to disperse, and these remarks had been made in low tones that could not be overheard by those nearest.

Taking a last look after those who had carried the fainting girl away, with the portion of the crowd that followed them, the detective turned and entered the bar-room again.

Here he made known his desire to go to his room, and the landlord called a boy and ordered him to show the way.

Delicate Don and his man were soon in the room, with the door closed.

"Now," said Don, "what is it you want to say to me, Tom?"

They had taken seats, and after hitching himself in his chair for a moment, as though uneasily, Tom Trump came to the point:

"I opine you'll admit that thar ar' gal is a darn fine woman of her age, 'bout as fine as they make 'em, in fact, won't ye?" he began.

"You mean Miss Letson? Yes, she is a mighty fine-looking girl, Tom."

"And mebbe jest as good as she is purty, too."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"That's what I thought. Now, Mister Danton, ther p'int of ther business is jest right hyer. Tom Trump is a man what was never known ter do a mean act when thar was a woman in ther case, and afore I go further wi' you in this hyer matter I want ter know fer sure that you are jest what ye claim ter be; that is, that you have ther paper ye say ye have."

The detective laughed at this.

"I see how it is, Tom," he declared. "That girl's pretty face, so pale and sorrowful in her swoon, has made its impression on you, and touched the soft place in your heart. But that is all right, and I honor you for it. You need have no doubts regarding my right in what I claim. Here is the paper; take it and look it over carefully. You will find it straight. I am willing to show you the proof, for I want you to help me in this matter."

He took a legal-looking paper from an inner pocket as he spoke, and put it in the miner's hands.

Tom Trump took it and began to open it in rather a clumsy fashion.

"I don't know as I kin make much out of et," he said, "but I kin read enough ter find your name in et, anyhow."

Having got it opened, he proceeded to read it in a seemingly slow way, and was some minutes in its perusal, when he handed it back again.

"I reckon et's all right," he acknowledged.

"Be assured that it is all right," seconded the detective. "Here, I'll read it aloud for you, so that you can get the full sense of it the better."

He proceeded to read.

There could scarcely be any question about the genuineness of the document.

It was framed in true legal style, and set forth that Donald Danton was duly and legally authorized to all the detective claimed.

Full and absolute power was given him—full possession of all mining and other interests, conditionally; and the condition was, that Lamia Letson was to have half of everything, whether from the profits or sale.

Tom Trump was satisfied. Now, he declared, he could go into the thing with a clear conscience, and it would be funny if they couldn't get possession of the mine and make it hum in the interest of the young woman. Anyhow, he could be counted on, he declared.

CHAPTER V.

PECULIAR PARTNERS.

A DAY or two previous to the time of our story a brace of peculiar characters had made their appearance at Kickapoo.

One of these was a Chinaman of the typical sort, clad after the manner of his kind, who rejoiced in the Celestial name of Chin Chop.

The other, the Chinaman's companion, was a young Irish lad who answered to the name of Terry, but whose name in full, as had been learned, was Terrence McCune.

These had taken up their quarters at the least pretentious of the three hotels of the camp, and the Celestial had let out that he was on the lookout for a good place to open an opium den.

They were peculiar characters, as said.

The Chinaman tried to exercise a sort of paternal authority over the lad, but Terry stood ever ready to resent his fatherly attentions.

On the other hand, the Chinaman evinced a fondness for the bottle, which the Irish lad made it his business to nip in the bud as often as he caught "John" in the act of taking a nip on the sly.

He was in the employ of the Chinaman, it appeared, for this very purpose, and seemed determined to do his whole duty. Chin Chop knew his own weakness in this direction, knew that whisky and attention to business could not go hand in hand, and had hired Terry to be his keeper.

Their business arrangement as employer and employed was a unique one. Terry's remuneration was altogether conditional, and there were fluctuations in his stock with every hour in the day. It was now up, now down; but on the whole it worked to Terry's advantage in the long run, for he was, as said, attentive to business.

Terry's keep was assumed by the Chinaman. Additional to that, the lad received a dime every time he cheated the Chinaman out of a drink when he would give way to the temptation and treat himself on the sly. On the other hand, if "John" stole a march on Terry now and then, and imbibed a clandestine dram, Terry had to refund a dime to the Chinaman by way of fine.

It was an arrangement that worked pretty well to the satisfaction of both parties concerned. It was impossible for Chin Chop to get drunk, the main point for which he was concerned, while at the same time it did not cut off his supply altogether. And then, it gave Terry wide scope for tricks, laying temptations in the Celestial's way and then putting in his appearance at the critical moment and reaping his reward.

But, enough, at this juncture, of these "worthies."

On this day of which we write the two were seated on the piazza of their hotel when the stage arrived.

When it had passed, and had gone on to the Merry Monarch and stopped, the Chinaman turned to his youthful guardian and said:

"Telly, you go gettee mail."

"All roight, Chopsey, as soon as it's sorted," was the response.

"You go right 'way," Chin Chop ordered. "Be solted by time you gettee there, allee samee."

"Nixey, be jabers! Sure, it won't take me no more nor wan minnit to run dhere and back, which same won't give you time to take more nor wan dhrink."

"Me no takee dlink this time, Telly. You go see if lettlet at post-office for Chin Chop allee samee; me settlee light here till you come back. Me no wantee dlink now anyhow, Telly."

"Do ye m'ane dhat, Chopsey?"

"Yes, allee samee; Chin Chop him honest Injun every time."

"Oi know how honest ye are, begob. Give me twinty cints as security and Oi'll be off."

The Chinaman looked at the lad for a moment in a comical way, but presently pulled the amount from his pocket and handed it over.

"All roight, Chopsey, old boy, now Oi'm off," cried Terry, slipping the money into his pocket and springing to his feet. "See dhat ye don't touch dhe bottle dhe while Oi'm gone."

The Celestial promised again, faithfully, that he would not, and the Irish lad darted away in the direction of the post-office.

When he had gone about half the distance between the two points he glanced back, and Chin Chop was nowhere to be seen.

Terry stopped and started back about as fast as he had been coming the other way, with determination in his eye.

Reaching the hotel he bounded into the bar-room, where he caught Chin Chop in the act of imbibing.

"Hold up, dhere, Chopsey!" the lad exclaimed, peremptorily.

The Chinaman stopped in the act, and put down the glass with a look of disgust on his face.

The barkeeper and the few who were present laughed heartily, for this thing had given them a good deal of amusement of late.

"How many doses has he been afther taking?" Terry asked of the man behind the bar. "Has he had more nor two already? Oi'm afther being interested, begob."

"He only jest came in," was the response. "This is his first one, and ye didn't give him time to get his nose in et."

"And no more Oi will, aythur," Terry declared.

"Chin Chop only wantee this one," the Chinaman declared, eying the glass fondly.

"Begob, ye said ye didn't want any at all, so ye did. Drop it, Chopsey, and come along wid me. Oi can't be afther trustin' ye, Oi see."

"You lettee me takee jest this one, Telly, and me takee no more all day, allee samee."

"And be tin cints out av pocket? Nixey, begob. You fork over dhe dime, me huckleberry, and dhen we'll go and see av dhere is any letters."

The Celestial begged, but Terry was firm, so Chin Chop had to pay the forfeit and also for the drink which he had not been permitted to taste. It was rather rough on him, as those present declared.

The pair went off together to the post-office.

When they reached there it was about the time the mail had been sorted and the window opened.

Terry stepped up and inquired for letters for himself and Chin Chop, and received one in his own name but none for the Celestial.

"Whoop!" he exclaimed. "Begob, but Oi have dhe best av ye dhis deal, Chopsey, old boy. Here's a letther from me best girl, sure. Don't sp'ake to me now till afther Oi read it."

"You gettee lettlet, now you tleat Chin Chop," the Chinaman proposed. "Me no gettee lettlet, me feel vely bad, wantee something to bracee up. Let's go back to hotel and you settlee him up for Chin Chop."

"No ye don't," cried Terry. "Oi'll give ye half of me letter whin Oi open it, and dhat will make it all roight. Oi'll give ye dhe invillup."

"Me no wantee him; do me no goodee."

"Begob, ye don't know a good thing whin ye see it, Chopsey. Dhe invillup is dhe best part. Sure, it's dhe part she licked wid her own swate tongue, and av ye ate it it's a kiss ye will be getting."

The crowd here enjoyed a laugh, as at the hotel, and the Chinaman and his youthful companion passed out.

When they reached the street they were just in time to hear the scream uttered by Lamia Letson, and to see the girl fall in her faint, as has been recorded.

Terry was about to run forward to her assistance, but the Chinaman laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"Holdee on," he said, "no be too freshee. Plenty folks to 'tend to lady."

Terry stopped short.

"Guess you're right," he agreed. "I'll jest take a look at dhe insides of dhis letter while dhe crowd is runnin' dhat way."

So, the pair stopped then and there and Terry opened his letter and read it, to himself first, and then aloud to his companion.

"Allee samee all light," the Celestial observed, when he had heard all.

"You bet," agreed Terry.

Folding the letter and cramming it deep down into a pocket, Terry now ran to join the crowd around the girl, with Chin Chop close at his heels.

There they heard and saw what has been set forth in the preceding chapter.

More than once they exchanged glances hard to interpret, but said nothing to reveal their thoughts.

When the young woman had been carried away by the two men, as set forth, and the crowd broke up, they entered the hotel bar-room.

A few moments later Delicate Don and Tom Trump came in, but remained only a moment, when they passed on through and up to their room for their private talk.

The Chinaman and his companion remained only a brief time, then, but passed out and bent their steps toward their own hotel.

"What you think of it, anyhow, Telly?" the Chinese asked in cautious tone, as they went along.

"By the living Joshua, it stumps me Chopsey!" was the response. "But, we must follow orders and 'tend to our own business. There's going to be a kick-up here; you can bet on that. But, begob, dhis won't do, Chopsey, old boy! Oi must not ferget, dhat it is Oirish Oi am, begorra!"

CHAPTER VI.

SOME SCHEMING GOING ON.

ONE of the prettiest of the new cottages at Kickapoo was the home of Lamia Letson.

It was out of the rough camp center, and about half-way between that point and Job Letson's mine, the "Little Sweetheart."

Job, as soon as fortune began to smile upon him, had thought first of his daughter, and had built this neat house expressly for her, deeding it to her as soon as completed.

Lamia's mother was dead, had been dead for years; but Job had done his duty by the girl, had given her a fair education and all the advantages he could afford, and at this time she was a young woman of more than average accomplishments for a poor girl.

They had a housekeeper, an elderly woman named Hannah Hunt, who thought a good deal of Lamia, and whom the girl loved in return.

When Woolfe Nathan and Austin Brett carried Lamia home, after her fainting on the street before the hotel, it was the housekeeper who opened to the knocking.

At the sight of the insensible girl, and the crowd of men who had followed, she gave a wild scream and caught the girl to her breast, demanding wildly to know whether she was dead, and what had happened.

"No, she's not dead, Mrs. Hunt," informed Nathan. "She has just received bad news, and the shock caused her to faint."

"Bad news! What was it? Job Letson is not—"

"You have said it, Nathan hastened; "Job Letson is not. He is dead."

"My God! Oh! the poor child, the poor child! But, carry her in and I will try to bring her to."

She made room for them now, and the still insensible girl was taken in.

A few women had followed the crowd, and now these pressed in after the bearers, closing the door behind them.

The girl was taken to a sitting-room and laid upon a lounge, and there the service of the two young men ended, and they retired immediately, leaving her to the care of the women.

After considerable effort Lamia was brought to consciousness once more, and this time seeing the kindly face of Mrs. Hunt berding over her,

she threw her arms around the neck of her friend and burst into tears. Relief had come. "Is it true, Aunt Hannah?" she sobbed. "Is it true that papa is dead? Oh! tell me it is not so!"

With soothing words the woman tried to comfort her, and finally she began to grow more calm, though her face told plainly of her great sorrow.

The young men, who had remained in another room during this time, now returned.

Going forward to where Lamia lay, Nathan addressed her:

"Miss Letson, I know how useless it is to express sympathy at such a time as this, for no words can in the least lighten your sorrow. Still, I am in sympathy with you in your great loss, and only wish it were in my power to lighten your burden. Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you, Mr. Nathan," was the reply. "No, there is nothing you can do. I ask only to be left alone now."

"Very well; I understand how you feel, and will retire. If you want me, or there is anything I can do for you, do not hesitate to command me."

Again she thanked him, and he and Brett withdrew.

They were about leaving the house when a thought struck Nathan, and bidding his companion wait for him, he went back to the room.

Motioning to Mrs. Hunt, he drew her out into the hall, where, taking from his pocket the letter Lamia had received at the post-office, he gave it to her, saying as he did so:

"Mrs. Hunt, here is the letter that brought the terrible news to Miss Letson. I think you had better destroy it, or at any rate keep it from the young lady for a day or two, unless she demands it of you. Anyhow, read it yourself. Under the circumstances this is justifiable."

"Perhaps."

"Positively it is. In it you will find mention of one Mr. Danton, whom, it says, Mr. Letson made his attorney before he died. This person has arrived here, and, to be honest about it, I do not like the man. He may be all he claims, and may have the power he asserts, but I think it best to warn Lamia not to place too much confidence in him at first, and above all things not to give him any more power than he now holds."

"I am obliged to you, Mr. Nathan, for this caution, I am sure," said Mrs. Hunt, in response to that. "I will tell Lamia what you have said."

"Understand me," Nathan urged, "I do not say anything further than that I do not like this man's looks. I do not know him, never saw him before in my life, and it is mainly for that reason I would urge caution in dealing with him."

"I see how it is, of course."

That was all, and the two men passed out, the housekeeper closing the door after them.

Acting upon Nathan's suggestion, Mrs. Hunt stopped in the hall and read the letter before returning to the room.

"There is no doubting it," she said to herself. "Whether right or wrong, Mr. Letson certainly gave this man power before he died, according to this."

Putting the letter into her pocket, she went back into the room where Lamia lay, to find the girl again in tears, and it was a considerable time before she could calm her.

Meantime Nathan and Brett, on leaving the house, had made their way toward the hotel, talking.

"I'm glad we've got a chance for a few words together, Brett," Nathan observed. "The deuce is going to be to pay here, I am afraid."

"It looks like it, that's so. Do you suppose this man Danton is armed with the power the letter ascribes to him? Can it be that Letson knew him before, and so sent for him?"

"There's no doubt about the fact of the matter, I guess," rejoined Nathan. "How it came about I am not prepared to say. But I shall have an interview with the man, and that will bring everything out and show me just what is what."

"If he demands the mine you'll have to surrender."

"Possession is a big point; you don't want to forget that."

"True; but, from all accounts, Don Danton is a terror, and will stand no trifling."

"There'll be no trifling, Brett, on my part, you bet!"

"What do you mean?"

"I must hold that mine at all hazards—that

is what I mean. If I can win the girl over to my side, by any means, I may be able to do it."

"And if not—"

"Then I must try some other plan. By the way, have you heard anything further from that Denver party?"

"There may be a letter at the office now. The last I heard they were about to send a man to look at the mine."

"And it isn't any more than half-prepared for them, is it?"

"No; too confounded bad that I put it off."

"It can be done to-night, or some other night before their man comes, provided I hold my grip on the Sweetheart."

"I am of the opinion that it must be done to-night or not at all."

"And why?"

"Because Don Danton is here."

"Rest easy about that. He will have no suspicion."

"Why, you just now said it depended upon your holding possession yourself!"

"I know I did; but on second thought I do not think it will make any difference. He will not spend his nights watching the mines."

"That is true enough; but it must be done this night, for the man may come at any moment. For the matter of that, he may be here now; may have come by the stage."

"That's so. Well, do it to suit yourself."

"I'll see to it to-night. You see that everything is left clear for me at your mine."

"Yes, I'll take care of that part of it. Here we are at the post-office; let us see if we have any mail."

They entered, and both received letters.

Stopping to open and read them there, an exclamation presently escaped Brett.

"What is it?" asked Nathan.

"Here's one from the Denver men, and their man started on the day this was written. Wouldn't wonder if he's here now."

"Does it give his name?"

"Howard Royland."

"Ten to one he was the rooster who was on top with Danton."

When Nathan had finished his letters they went out, crossed to the Merry Monarch and entered there. As they did so the proprietor addressed Brett.

"Ha! there you are, Mr. Brett," he said. "Here is a gentleman that wants to see you. This is Mr. Brett, the manager of the Wonder, Mr. Royland. He is the man you are looking for."

"Mr. Brett, delighted to know you," cried Royland, coming forward in his brisk way, with extended hand. "Presume you are expecting me. I am the man sent up from Denver to look at the Wonder Mine in the interest of the intending buyers. How d'ye do?"

CHAPTER VII.

AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE.

THE two shook hands warmly, and usual remarks were exchanged in the way of mutual introduction.

"Well, we'll go to my room," said Brett, presently. "Bridgelow, send up some cigars and a couple of bottles of wine, will you?"

"Yes, I'll send you the best I've got," was the landlord's response. "Here, you Ben!" to his boy; "get a move on ye, now, and carry these up to Mr. Brett's room."

Brett led the way and conducted his guest up-stairs to his room, and the boy was not far behind them with the bottled sociability. In a few minutes they were comfortably seated and smoking.

"Well, you want to know about the mine, of course," Brett opened the subject for discussion.

"Yes, I must have all the particulars about it, I suppose. I am to make a general report when I return, upon its history as well as its value."

"I see. I tell you, Mr. Royland, this mine is a bargain, for somebody, and it is that very fact that makes it look suspicious. I have done my best to induce the owners to hold fast to it."

"Then you are not an owner yourself, eh?"

"Well, I have an interest, but not a controlling one, and you see it is all the harder for me to give it up. I know the Wonder for just what it is."

"The others are determined to sell, then?"

"Yes, pig-headed and blindly determined to close out."

"What is their reason?"

"That is the natural question, and it is easily answered. You see, the two men who hold the lion's share of the stock have had a falling out,

over a love affair, and are at dagger's points with each other."

"Ha! a woman in the case, eh?"

"As you might be sure. I tell you, Mr. Royland, this world would be a fine place if there was no women to keep us in hot water."

"You may be right, Mr. Brett; but, where the deuce would we fellows be if there were no women?"

"Ha! ha! ha! That's so! But, we were talking about the mine."

"Yes; pardon my interruption."

"The digression was mine. As I was saying, they are bad friends now, and as they will not agree upon anything like a compromise the mine has to be sold. They will be sorry for it in six months' time, I know, but they are determined. It is rough on me, for I would like to hold on."

"Couldn't such an arrangement be made?"

"I hardly think so. The buyers will want it free and clear, or not at all, as is usually the case."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"So, you see, I am forced to a thing I don't like. Well, then, here is a mine that is second to none in this section, offered for sale for almost a song. One hundred thousand dollars is all that is asked for a property that, in less than a year, properly worked, will be worth a cool million. I tell you, Royland, it is a shame to see it sold when we five who hold it now might reap our fortune in a brief time."

"I agree with you. It is the very fact that it is for sale that makes buyers suspicious, for this place of Kickapoo has got a name in the market."

"You bet it has. No wonder, either. Look at the Sweetheart, a mine that is not beginning to yield yet, turning out a princely percentage; and I give you leave to compare the ore of the Wonder with it."

"From what you say, I have no doubt but I shall be able to report highly in favor of your mine, Mr. Brett. I hope so, anyhow."

"I know you will, if you are fair with us. I want you to give it a thorough investigation, and render your report in exact accordance. We ask no favors at all, for we know the mine."

"It is too late to do anything to-day, of course."

"Decidedly. Supper will soon be ready, and then night will be at hand shortly after. No; we'll take in the sights of the camp this evening, if you are inclined, and to-morrow you may begin your work."

"That suits me. No use going to the mine to crawl around in the dirt unless I go to work, and it won't pay to dress for such a visit to-night. To-morrow will be all in season."

So they talked on, Brett giving further particulars of no interest to us, and finally drifting to other subjects.

Meanwhile the elegantly-dressed sport, Delicate Don, had returned to the bar-room with Tom Trump, entering shortly after Brett and Royland went up-stairs.

The detective cast glances around the room, and seeing Woolfe Nathan, went forward to where he was seated and addressed him.

"Your name is Woolfe Nathan, I believe?" he said.

"That is my name," was the response; "but, how did you know it?"

"I guessed who you were, when we exchanged some remarks a little while ago."

"You seem to be good at guessing, then. Sit down, for I suppose you want to talk business with me."

"That is the case, exactly," the detective admitted, as he sat down. "I have already informed you concerning the business that has brought me here."

"Yes; with the letter that came to Miss Letson mentioning you. Well, Mr. Danton, what do you purpose doing in the matter?"

"I should rather look for an answer to that question from you."

"Well, this is no time to mince matters, as you will admit."

"I am glad you see it in that light."

"You have not shown me your authority. I suppose you are prepared to do so before we go further."

Without answer in words, the detective took his paper from his pocket and gave it into Nathan's hand, then leaned back in his chair to await its reading.

Nathan opened it and read it carefully.

"There seems to be nothing wrong about this," he admitted, when he had done, folding it and handing it back.

"It is just what it appears," Danton assured, "and genuine. If you know anything about the

reputation of Don Danton, you could not think otherwise."

"Certainly not; but, there are other points to be considered. I was left in charge by Job Letson when he went away, and I must be formally discharged before I can give up the mine to another."

"That is all right. You see, I am in position to discharge you, for I am, as it were, Letson himself, in law."

"You lack one thing."

"What is that?"

"Possession."

"Then you mean to fight it, do you?"

"I do not intend to give up without a struggle. You cannot dismiss me till you are in actual possession of the property."

"I am in possession already, in law."

"Yet I am in possession in fact, and hold about nine points the advantage over you."

"Well, I think there is nothing more to be said, if that is your determination in the matter. I certainly mean to carry out what I have undertaken."

"Have you seen Miss Letson?"

"No; and it is not necessary that I should, so far as my authority goes. She holds the same relation to the property now as she did when her father was living. I am given full power."

"Still, you might consult her out of courtesy."

"You need not remind me of what my duties of civility are, sir."

"I am about to remind you of something else. You will find that Miss Letson has a will of her own."

"A poor woman she'd be if she hadn't."

"And I think she'll use it, too. She knows me, and I have no doubt that she will desire me to continue in the office I now hold."

"If so, possibly her desire can be gratified, Mr. Nathan. The mine will still require a manager, and there is no reason why you may not continue on in the office, for a time, anyhow."

This proposition took the man somewhat aback.

"You can't mean that, can you?" he questioned, doubtfully.

"Of course I mean it," was the assurance.

"I shall make no changes immediately."

"Well, that puts a new face on the matter, Mr. Danton. May I speak to you a little in confidence?"

"Suit yourself about that."

"The fact of the business is, I hope to marry Lamia Letson one of these days, and want to continue on at the mine and hold myself in her good will."

"There's nothing out of the way in an ambition of that sort. Don't imagine for a moment that I am going to interfere in your love affairs. I hope you'll succeed in your suit."

"Well, by thunder! this is better of you than I dreamed of."

"You are willing to acknowledge my authority, then, and yield up the mine without forcing me to the necessity of fighting for it, are you?"

"Yes, and I've no more to say now. I expected to be pitched out neck and heels, and I'm agreeably surprised. You have done the fair thing Danton, and I'll not forget it. Come, let's take something."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT MISS LETSON'S COTTAGE.

EMPLOYED as foreman at the Little Sweetheart Mine was a young man named John Hinyon.

He was sober and industrious, about twenty-six years of age, of good figure and rather attractive in looks and general appearance.

This man and Woolfe Nathan were not on friendly terms, and, could Nathan have had his way about it, Hinyon would have been dismissed and sent adrift with short notice long ago.

Job Letson, however, favored the young man, and seemed to like him, so his position was secure in spite of all Nathan could say or do against him. Hinyon had a friend at court, to let the secret out; and that friend was Lamia Letson.

The truth of the matter was, both Hinyon and Nathan were attentive to the young lady, and of the two, Hinyon was the more favored.

It was this that had made the bad feeling that existed between them, and it was not likely to become any better as time passed. There was every reason for the breach to widen.

On this day, when work at the mine stopped and the men were on their way to their various places of habitation, John Hinyon learned for the first that Job Letson was dead.

Changing his direction immediately upon

hearing this said news, he went to the Letson cottage, knocking for admittance at a side door.

He had heard also, of course, of Lamia's fainting in the street upon receipt of the news.

As soon as the door was opened by the housekeeper, he inquired:

"How is Lamia?"

"Oh, she is much better, now, John," was the response. "Come in."

He entered, and found himself in the presence of the sorrowing girl, who now had control over her emotions.

"Lamia," he spoke, advancing with frankly extended hand, "I have just heard about it. I am more sorry for you than I can express in words, God knows."

She took his hand.

"Isn't it terrible, John," she remarked, not questioning. "I thought it would kill me, at first. Sit down, for I want to talk to you a little. You are like a brother to me."

The young man sat down, and Lamia continued.

"There will be changes at the mine, now, of course. Papa has appointed a man to act in his place, and he is already here. Of course he will take charge of the mine, and I want to ask you if you desire to stay at the mine any longer."

"Of course I desire to stay," was the answer.

"I am glad of it. I am going to do what I can to have you promoted, now, to the place held by Mr. Nathan."

"Is he going away?" in some surprise.

"Yes, if I can bring it about. It is a change father contemplated making very soon anyhow."

"You surprise me."

"It need not surprise you, for you know father did not like him any too well, while he has been pleased with you more and more ever since you came here. I am speaking to you plainly, you see."

"Well, it will be an agreeable change, of course, and I promise you I will do my very best to—"

"Of course you will. It cannot be as I say, however, for according to what I learn, that Mr. Danton whom papa appointed has full power, just the same as if he were papa himself."

"Danton, you say?"

"Yes; I believe it is Detective Don Danton."

"If that is the case, you may rest assured that he will do justice all around."

"So I think. He has not been to see me yet, but I suppose he will come, and when he does I will speak to him about you, and—"

A knocking at the front door interrupted.

"Who can that be, Aunt Hannah?" the young lady asked, quickly.

"I'll soon see, my child," was the response.

"Perhaps it is the gentleman now."

She went to the door, and a man's voice was heard.

When the housekeeper returned to the room, the dainty detective followed her in.

"This is Miss Letson, sir," said Mrs. Hunt, by way of introduction.

The detective bowed.

"Miss Letson," he spoke, "I came here this afternoon, the bearer of sad news for you; but there was a messenger even more speedy than I. You have my sincerest sympathy in your hour of trouble. My name is Donald Danton, and I have been appointed proprietary attorney, to call it that, of your father's interests."

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Danton," the young lady responded. "Be seated, if you please. But, first let me introduce Mr. John Hinyon, a foreman in father's mine."

The introduction was acknowledged, and Delicate Don sat down.

"Everything that was your father's is now in my hands," he said. "I have full power, the same as he had himself. It is, however, conditional. The condition is, that you are to have one-half of the profits of the mine, or one-half of the price it brings, if I see fit to sell it."

"But, you will not sell?"

"No, not if it will pay better to work it; and certainly not if you prefer to keep it. I will be guided mainly by your wishes, regardless of my authority, when they do not conflict with your best interests."

"Thank you, Mr. Danton. I am satisfied to have it so. Father read much about you in the papers, and often spoke of you as a prince among men—pardon me; and I am sure he acted for the best in placing his interests in your hands. You will assume charge at once, of course."

"To-morrow, Miss Letson."

"And you will, of course, make changes."

"Not immediately. I prefer to let things run as now until I am able to get a thorough acquaintance with every detail."

"Do you intend to retain Mr. Nathan?"

"I have had a talk with him, and for the present he is to remain."

"Very well, I suppose you know best. I have a request to make, however, when you are ready to make a change there."

Danton looked a little surprised.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That when you remove Mr. Nathan you will put Mr. Hinyon in his place."

The detective eyed the young man keenly for a moment, and then demanded:

"Do you think you are qualified to fill that position, sir?"

Lamia spoke up quickly before he could reply.

"Father considered him so, Mr. Danton," she said, "and was going to make the change very shortly."

"If that is the case, then," Danton rejoined, "it shall be as you wish. For the present, however, Mr. Hinyon, continue where you are."

"Very well, sir," was the civil response.

Hinyon rose, then, making the excuse that he had not had supper, and took his leave.

When he had gone the detective spoke again.

"Your father, then, contemplated the removal of Mr. Nathan, did he?" he observed.

"Yes," the answer. "Father had grown to dislike him; in fact he never liked him very well, and the change would have been made in a short time had father not been disabled by his fall."

"I am sorry I did not know of this sooner, for I have promised the man to retain him for the present. However, by the first of the coming month I can make such changes as I see fit to make, without going back on anything I have pledged."

"You must use your own discretion, of course, sir."

"Yes, I must do that, but your wishes shall be regarded as far as possible. But, I did not intend to trouble you with business at this time, Miss Letson—"

"It was my own doings, sir."

"Thank you. I came here merely to pay my respects to you, and to offer you my help in any way that it might be needed. In my position I must speak plainly, Miss Letson. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, sir; not that I can think of at present."

"Are you— I speak as your father's representative, you know; are you in need of money for present use?"

"Not at all, sir, thank you," was the answer.

"Let business matters take the regular course, and carry out father's wishes regarding me, that will do."

"That shall be done, most assuredly."

"You intend remaining here, I suppose?"

"For the present."

"Then, of course, you will call again, and if there is anything about which I can inform you I shall be glad to do so."

Danton took this as his signal to go, and after a few minutes further talk, of no moment to our story, took his departure, returning to the hotel.

"Complications are arising already," he muttered as he went along. "It seems this John Hinyon holds first place in Miss Letson's regard, and that she means to push his interests. Well, we'll see how it works."

CHAPTER IX.

DELICATE DON WORSTED.

PERHAPS it has been mentioned that the "Best Hand" was the leading saloon at this camp of Kickapoo.

It was a live resort of its kind, and the chief attraction of the place when work was done and night opened for pleasure and dissipation.

There was an attractive bar, a dancing floor and a string band of one fiddler, and in the rear a gaming den that was usually well patronized, where many a miner dropped the hard earnings of a week in less than an hour.

It was about nine o'clock on the evening following events in order when Delicate Don and his man Trump entered the saloon.

There was a big crowd, as there was every night, and dancing was going on. Plenty of women were present, ready to trip the light fantastic with any one who wanted a partner.

Delicate Don and Tom Trump passed just within the door and looked around upon the scene for some moments before venturing further. While they stood thus, Woolfe Nathan came up and accosted Don.

"Well, you have dropped in to see the elephant, eh?" he remarked.

"Yes," responded the detective; "and it seems to be a pretty good sized one, too."

"It is, and as lively as it is big. By the way,

Mr. Danton, I take this man to be a friend of yours, seeing him with you a good deal."

He indicated Tom Trump as he spoke.

"He is in my employ," Danton answered. "His name is Trump. Tom, let me introduce you to Mr. Nathan, manager of the Sweetheart Mine."

Tom Trump touched his hat respectfully, with an awkward attempt at a bow, and Nathan extended his hand to him.

"In your employ did you say, Mr. Danton?" Nathan asked the next moment, turning to the natty detective.

"Yes; I intend to make a place for him at the Sweetheart as soon as I can do so satisfactorily."

"Ha! is that so? I think I can give you a pointer."

"Very likely you are able to do so."

"Let's sit down back here."

They went to a table and took seats, and there Nathan explained what he had in mind.

"You see," he said, "there is a young fellow at the mine, holding the post of what you might call assistant superintendent, and one who is not worth his salt. Only for Letson I would have bounced him long ago."

"What is his name?"

"John Hinyon."

"And you think that would be the place for my man Trump, do you?"

"That is just what I was going to propose. I will get rid of the fellow in the morning, and your man can take the place."

Delicate Don smiled.

"We must go a little slower than that, Mr. Nathan," he said. "If Mr. Letson liked the man he must have had some good reason for keeping him, and as I am in his boots now, so to say, I must follow his plans as closely as I can."

"Then you don't want him discharged?"

"Not at once. We'll give him a chance first, and I'll study him a little."

"That's a bad thing to do. You ought to begin by making a clean sweep right at the start."

"Would you be of the same mind were I to begin with the manager? You ought to have the same regard for the men as for yourself."

"My office is different," was the response, though the man flushed a little. "I gave satisfaction to Mr. Letson, and have managed the mine well during his absence. I have a right to more consideration."

"Well, we will not discuss it further now. Do not take action regarding the young man until I give you leave, anyhow."

"Then I may as well resign my office as manager, Mr. Danton, if I am not to be manager in fact."

"You may do so if you want to. Do not forget that I stand in the position of owner of the mine, and that I intend to have it managed according to my own will."

There was a moment of silence.

"Oh, well, I am not so foolish as to let so small a matter make trouble between us, Mr. Danton," Nathan presently said. "We'll let it drop, and of course I must respect your directions or step down and out. Hello, here comes Mr. Brett, of the Wonder Mine, with the expert who has come to examine it."

These two had just come out from the gaming-room, and Nathan signaled to them to come over to where he sat.

They came, and introductions followed. It was not necessary, of course, to introduce Danton and Howard Royland, since they had been traveling companions.

All found seats around the table, wine and cigars were called for, and when they were brought, nearly all partook liberally of them.

"Mr. Royland is going to test the ore of the Wonder to-morrow," Brett presently remarked.

"I hope he will find it satisfactory," observed Nathan.

"No fear on that score," was the rejoinder.

"And I have a favor to ask of you, Mr. Nathan," Brett said further.

"A favor?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know you have only to name it."

"When Mr. Royland has satisfied himself with the Wonder, I would like to have him test the ore of the Sweetheart and compare the two mines. Your mine is considered second to none here."

"Why, certainly he is welcome to do so, so far as I am concerned. You have no objections, Mr. Danton?"

"None whatever?"

"Then we'll do it," decided Brett. "And, if the ore of the Wonder is not up to that

of the Sweetheart I stand ready to treat all around."

"From all that is said, so much in favor of the Wonder, I anticipate being able to make a splendid report in its favor," observed Royland.

"We look for nothing else," declared Brett. "Why, here is Mr. Nathan, he is well aware what kind of a mine it is; ask him what he thinks about it."

"I am satisfied already," Royland assured. "I'll let the work of to-morrow prove. Of course assaying will be only a matter of form, the mine being so well known for just what it is."

There was more talking, much more, but none of vital interest to us, so it may be passed over.

Tom Trump had felt that he was rather out of place here, he being only a common miner and clad in rough attire, while these four men were well dressed.

He had little or nothing to say, nothing was said to him, and finally he got up and said he thought he would go out and look around a little by himself, as he felt more at home in rougher company.

He was excused, of course, the spruce detective reminding him to be on hand at the mine in the morning.

After he had gone, the others finally repaired to the gaming room, where they remained a long time.

The hour was late when they came out, and they paused at the bar for a social good-night.

While they were there a great, bearded fellow strode up to Delicate Don and gave him a slap on the neck with no gentle force.

The dainty detective turned in an instant.

"What do you mean by that, you ruffian?" he cried.

"It means that right hyar is what kin chaw you all up!" was the fellow's cry.

As he said so, he placed himself in fighting attitude, brushing his fist under Delicate Don's nose.

"You had better have a care," warned the detective, as coolly as possible. "I guess you do not know who I am, do you?"

"Reckon I jest do, then," was the retort. "You ar' Don Danton, ther great detective, who has ther reppytashun of bein' able ter lick anything what wears boots."

"You do know me, then, do you? And you think you can whip me, do you? Well, now, I care nothing about claiming championship, and I'm willing to acknowledge that you are the better man."

"Ho, ho! That's one way ter crawl out of et, that ar is. But, et won't work fer a cent. I've come hyer ter lick ye, and I've got ter do et. I've made a bet that I kin lick Delicate Don, and I'm goin' ter win et. No use yer hangin' back now, so step right up and take yer medicine."

"All right, if you are bound to have it."

"And I am, ye kin jest bet yer boots on't."

The sport detective stepped forward and put up his arms, and the two men came to blows immediately.

How it happened no one could rightly tell, but somehow Delicate Don got the worst of it in a few seconds. Did he slip? or was this burly fellow really the better man?

Be that as it may, the dainty detective was suddenly lifted from the floor, and, after a brief struggle, was sent flying half-way across the room, where he fell in a half-dazed condition.

His friends sprang to his aid, and when next they looked his assailant had disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

CHIN CHOP AND TERRY "EXHIBIT."
CHIN CHOP, the Chinaman, and Terry, his keeper, at their hotel, were still carrying on their unique farce, to the amusement of the patrons of that establishment.

The Celestial was doing his best to beat his watchful guardian and get a pull at the coveted bottle, while Terry was fully determined not to give him the chance to impose upon him the fine of a dime.

After supper on this evening of which we write the peculiar pair left the hotel and went for a walk about the camp, and did not return until well along in the evening. When they did return they came in with a rusb, the Chinaman some seconds ahead.

He sprang to the bar and pantingly demanded:

"Give me dlink—quick!"

Out came the bottle and glass, and the Celestial poured himself a dram with nervous haste.

Before he had time to lift it to his lips, however, into the room rushed the breathless Terry, who, giving the glass a knock, sent it to the floor.

"Nixey, begob!"

"Please, Telly, just one dlink," Chin Chop begged.

"And ante up me tin cints? Well, I guess not. You fork out the tinner Oi have just earned, av ye plaze."

"Me allee samee givee you fifty cents, you lettee me dlink one glass," begged the thirsty Chinese. "Be good boy, allee samee, Telly."

"I'm always a good boy, Chopsey, old boss. You hired me for to kape you from drinking, and, begob! Oi'm goin' to do it, you let! Oi'm good fur dat, every toime!"

"But, me say me givee you fifty cents."

"Yis; and ye got wan taste dhe devil couldn't be stoppin' av ye till ye had got back dhe fifty cints and spoilt me fur a dime besides."

"No; allee samee honest—"

"Oh, Oi know ye, Chopsey; Oi know ye."

"But, me must have one dlink, else me die, vely sure."

"Begob, thin, ye will have to be afther dyin', dhat's all, fur never a smell do ye get if Oi can help it."

"Only one—"

"Not a half a wan. Fork over dhe dime."

Terry stood with hand out, and reluctantly the Chinaman gave him the dime and paid for the drink he had not enjoyed.

The crowd laughed, and one fellow, for the sake of seeing the fun carried further, proposed to treat the Chinaman, and invited him up.

Chin Chop was at the bar with a single leap, smacking his lips in happy anticipation of what was coming. Now he was sure of a drink.

"Was he?"

"Now, Chopsey," called out Terry, "it's tin cints fur you or me, wan or dhe other av us, and begob Oi'm looking fur Terrence McCune, every toime."

"No, Telly, no; this time no countee," Chin Chop protested.

"The dickens it don't!" cried Terry. "Ain't you afther thrying fur a nip av dhe craythur? And av Oi ch'ate ye out av it won't dhat be tin cints to me credit? Oi guess it will."

At this the crowd began to take sides with one or the other, some urging the Celestial to go on and take the drink, and others advising Terry to see that he didn't get it and so win his dime.

"You lettee me go this one time, Telly," pleaded Chin Chop. "Me no do it allee samee by own self; me gettee tleat. Me takee no more, you bettee."

"Nixey. Fork over yer tin cints, and come away from dhere."

"Down with et," some one cried out. "He can't stop ye now, Yaller."

Terry produced an old single-barreled pistol from somewhere under his coat, and leveled it at the Celestial.

"Chopsey, ye know better nor dhat," he warned. "Put down dhe glass, or by dhe powers av punk av Oi don't probe a hole in ye dhat won't heal up in ten wakes."

"No shootee, Telly, no shootee!" cried the Chinaman, as he put down the glass and made a hasty retreat.

"Oi thought Oi'd bring ye to terms," Terry declared. "Ante up dhe dime, now, and dhen sit down and behave yersel'."

The Chinaman made haste to comply, giving the lad the ten cents he had earned, and taking a seat, but not without a wistful look at the bar.

"That's what I'd call a darn shame," growled the man who had offered the free drink. "Now I have got ter get away with both of these hyer glasses meself—"

"Not er tall necessary," cried out a dozen voices at once.

"Vull, mebbey not, but I'll do et jest ter save any hard feelin's, ye know. But et ar' a darn shame. Hyer this poor Chinese can't git a chance ter wet his whistle er tall, nohow."

"Me gettee chance by'm by," Chin Chop vowed.

"Et's ter be hoped ye will, b'mighty. Yer will 'arn et, that's sure."

The peculiar compact between the two had been fully explained, and the crowd was able to appreciate the situation fully.

There was a good deal of talk among the crowd, and a good many jokes were cracked at Chin Chop's expense, Terry coming in for his share with the rest.

After a time Chin Chop got up and passed out of the saloon by a rear door.

Terry looked after him for a moment, but did not follow at once. He looked as if he was puzzled.

"Phwere has he gone to, Oi wonder?" he presently muttered.

"Hah! me lad, he has given ye the slip this time," cried the bartender.

"He's made a dodge for some other saloon," said one man, "and he'll come back as full as a tick."

"Not av Oi know it he won't!" cried Terry.

Up he got and ran out the way the Celestial had gone, to the laughter of the crowd.

No sooner had he disappeared than Chin Chop sprung in at the front door and made a single stride to the bar.

"Givee me bottle, quick!" he cried.

"Here you are, and you'd better be lively."

The bartender put the bottle and glass out in haste.

Chin Chop caught up the bottle, and like a flash it disappeared under his peculiar coat.

"Nothel bottle, quick," he cried. "Me pay, allee samee me foole blame boy this timee. Say how muchee, quick."

The crowd laughed louder than ever, seeing the Celestial's game.

Another bottle was put out, and Chin Chop hurriedly paid the amount demanded.

Barely had he done this, and poured out a glass of the stuff, when Terry came dashing back into the room.

The louder laughing had, it was guessed, given him warning of the Chinaman's return, and he made haste to block his game.

But Terry was too late this time, for before he could reach the bar the wily Chinese put the glass to his lips and drained it at a gulp.

The crowd was wild, now, and enjoyed the fun immensely.

"Oi call dbat a m'ane thrick av ye, Chopsey," Terry complained.

"You owe me ten cents," was the response.

"You better pay him, quick."

"Yes, Oi'll pay, fur it's as fair wan way as dhe other," Terry promptly offered; and he paid.

"Now me wantee no more," declared Chin Chop. "Come, let us go to bed, Telly. Me allee samee vely sleepy now."

At this the crowd went off again.

Terry now began to suspect something, evidently, and looked around.

As said before, the crowd had divided, some being for him and some for the Celestial.

"Feel in their yaller's coat," some fellow called out.

"He's got a hull bottle of et stowed away thar," exclaimed another.

"No, Telly; no, no!" cried Chin Chop, waving the lad off. "Melican man he foolee you."

"Mebby he does," cried Terry, "but begob Oi know a Chinaman dhat won't fool me fur long. Have you got a bottle hid about ye?"

"Allee samee me honest Injun, every time. Me no gottee bottle, you bettee. You stay here, Telly, till me go see a man. Me be light back, vely quick."

He was backing toward the front door while speaking, and suddenly he turned and dashed out.

"Oi'm right wid ye," cried Terry, as he started in pursuit. "I've got tar see dhe same feller, sure."

And out he went in hot chase.

The loud laughter of the crowd followed them, and those who stepped out to look laughed the louder when they saw them going in opposite directions as fast as they could run.

No amount of shouting would stop them; Terry was deaf to all directions his friends shouted at him, and in a moment more they had disappeared from sight in the darkness. They had played a clever game, and were now free to devote themselves to other matters.

When the hotel closed they had not returned to their room, and they were seen no more that night. Where were they? After the camp was asleep, three dusky figures stood together under the deep shades of a clump of trees outside the camp, two of whom were Chin Chop and Terry. The third personage was "Delicate" Don Danton.

CHAPTER XI.

DANTON TAKES CHARGE.

A BUSY place is astir early, and so it was with Kickapoo.

The mines were all humming with activity before the drones and late risers were out of bed.

We say all the mines, but there was one exception, understood, and that was the Wonder, which was not working at all.

Always the first man at the Sweetheart was John Hinyon, and on this occasion he was there

a little earlier than usual, if anything, to see that everything was in perfect order.

He did not find it so.

There was much that displeased his eye, and he went about the place with a frown upon his brow.

Suddenly taking leave of the Sweetheart, he went over to the Wonder and began an exploration that lasted quite a little time.

When he returned there was a dark cloud upon his face, which the men who had come to work by this time were quick to notice. He said nothing, and when it was time to begin work directed the men.

It was nearly an hour later when Wolfe Nathan made his appearance at the office.

Hinyon had been watching for him, and soon presented himself before the manager, his face still clouded.

There were no wasted words, and no civil morning greetings were exchanged between them. Hinyon came to business immediately.

"There has been more secret work going on here, Mr. Nathan," he announced bluntly.

"What do you mean?" was demanded.

"You know what I mean. I have reported only one case."

"Well, explain yourself."

Some ore has been taken from this mine during the night, and I find it has been put in the Wonder, to salt that worthless concern."

"You had better be careful how you make such a charge as that, John Hinyon. Can you prove what your asert? Who would dare to come here and steal our ore? You had better be careful, I tell you."

"Are you going to let it pass again and say nothing about it?"

"John Hinyon, see here: I am manager of this mine yet. You have done your whole duty when you report these thing to me. I will not permit you to demand what I am going to do about it. That is my business. If you take my advice you will be very careful how you make charges of this kind. You may get into trouble. Dont mention it to another soul, but leave it for me to investigate."

Without a word the young man turned and left the office, going back to his post of duty.

The cloud upon his face was darker still, and there was an expression in his keen eyes that meant something.

About this time Dainty Don made his first appearance from the hotel.

Evidently the late hour at which he had retired, or the shaking up he had received at the saloon, had caused him to sleep late.

When he came out, after breakfast, he found his man, Tom Trump, awaiting him on the hotel piazza, and joined him immediately in something of an excited manner. It seemed something was wrong.

"Tom, the deuce is to pay," he greeted.

"What's the matter, boss?" Tom asked, wondering.

"Why, I've lost the paper giving me possession of the mine."

"Whew!" the miner whistled. "That's bad, I allow. Whar did ye lose et?"

"That's what I'd like to know. I missed it when I dressed, and can't find it anywhere."

Mr. Trump scratched his head.

"Have ye told anybody about et?" he asked.

"No, not yet."

"Then don't mention et. Ye have shown ther dockymnt enough ter prove yer claim, and that's all that's needed."

"I don't know but you're right, but still I want to find it. I can't imagine where I lost it, unless it was at the saloon last night when I had the set-to with that ruffian."

"I heerd about that this mornin'. Mebbe it dropped out of yer pocket then and somebody picked et up."

"It must be so. Confound the fellow, if I hadn't slipped I would have thrown him through a window. Perhaps it will be returned to me."

"Anyhow, et ain't of much 'count to anybody but the owner, so you needn't worry about et, I should say. Mebby et will show up at the right time ter prove yer claim, ef it's questioned."

"Yes, perhaps. Well, let's go to the mine."

Together they made their way to the office of the Sweetheart.

Manager Nathan was there to greet Danton, and he gave him charge of everything without reserve.

"You will find things pretty much as Mr. Letson left them," he explained. "I have not meddled with any of his things, expecting he would return."

"I'll merely take a casual look around, for the present," said Danton, "and we'll go out and look at the mine. I can tell more in that

way, for the first work, than by looking through books and papers."

"The office isn't in a very presentable shape," Nathan offered apology, "for I don't have the time. I put in most of my efforts at the shaft, and there I think you will find everything in pretty good order. We'll go out as soon as you are ready, and I'll show you around."

Danton was soon done.

He looked over Letson's papers and books a little, and then announced himself ready.

Nathan and he went out together, Tom Trump following—at Danton's bidding; and proceeded to the mine proper, where all was bustle and activity.

Here John Hinyon greeted Danton, to Nathan's astonishment, and answered such questions as were put to him. Nathan was not aware the two had met before, and was surprised when he learned where they had been introduced.

Some time was spent here, but no word was passed between Nathan and Hinyon, as the dainty detective noticed.

When ready to return to the office, Danton said:

"Mr. Hinyon, come to the office with us. I have a matter of business that requires your presence."

When they entered the office, and Danton and Nathan had taken seats, he said further:

"I am about to make a little change here, Mr. Hinyon. I am satisfied with the appearance of things under your charge, and I am going to promote you—"

Nathan gave a start.

"—To the office of superintendent. My man Trump will take the place you now hold, as soon as he is sufficiently posted. You will tako pains to give him all the insight you can, and so give him a good start."

"Thank you, sir," said Hinyon. "I will do the best I can, and, acting in the capacity you have seen fit to name, will see that the work is carried on as now, in the best manner I am capable of directing it. I may have some lessons to learn from Mr. Trump."

"I don't believe I kin give ye any p'int, jedgin' by what I seen at ther shaft," Tom modestly declared.

"That is all for the present," Nathan added.

"Go back to your work, and see to it that every man does his part well and to the best interest of the success of the mine."

Hinyon went out, followed by Tom Trump.

Danton and Nathan smoked and talked, the former looking further into the affairs of the office as they did so.

Presently the door opened and two men came in, being Austin Brett and the young expert, Howard Royland, who were on their way to the Wonder.

"We're goin' to the mine," Brett explained, "and thought maybe you gentlemen would like to go along with us. What do you say to it? Mr. Royland thinks he can get through in an hour."

"What to you say, Mr. Danton?" asked Nathan. "For myself, I'd rather like to go along, and think I will. Do not feel under press to go unless you want to go. You may care nothing about it."

"I'll go, certainly," the sport detective agreed. "This will give me some mining knowledge, which is what I am after just now."

They made ready in a few minutes, and all set off in the direction of the Wonder.

Arriving at the shaft, lights were secured, and all entered.

Here the expert was supposed to have full charge.

CHAPTER XII.

INVESTIGATING THE WONDER.

AUSTIN BRETT having armed himself with a pick and some giant powder, the little company went forward into the dismal hole.

"Now, Mr. Royland," said he, stopping presently, with the pick ready for business, "just indicate your spot, and I will strike and give you a sample. Anywhere you say, now; it makes no difference to me."

"Let drive at the nearest point, then," Royland directed, carelessly.

"All right, here goes."

Brett drew back the pick and attacked the wall vigorously, and in a few moments crumbled off some good sized pieces.

The unsuspecting Royland had allowed him to select his own spot. There are more wily tricks in the world than the innocent ever dream of, and this was one. Mr. Royland had much to learn at his business yet.

Brett had not spoken until he came to the very place from where he desired the first

samples to be taken. His seeming carelessness about the matter led the expert into bidding him strike anywhere, thus giving him liberty to attack the desired spot without any appearance of selecting.

"There you are, sir," Brett said. "Gather your samples and we'll move on."

Royland stooped and picked up some of the fragments, putting them in a bag he carried, and they went forward further.

"Say when you want me to strike again," Brett presently invited. "I want to give as full and fair a showing as you can desire. We have nothing to conceal here."

"Well, strike anywhere here, then," the young man directed as before.

Without taking another step forward Brett turned to the wall and knocked off some more chunks, this time larger ones than before.

Royland here made further selections, and they continued on their way to the end of the drift, where quite a heap of ore was found, evidently lying just where it had been broken from the virgin rock.

"Now," said Brett, here, "I will put in a charge of powder, and we'll retire till it goes off, and then you will be able to have a thorough idea of just what the lode is worth. Wait here just a moment and I'll fix it."

He stepped forward, while the others naturally drew back to put themselves out of danger.

When the charge had been placed and the fuse lighted, Brett came hurrying back to join the others, and all retired to a safe distance to await the explosion.

It soon followed, and all went forward to see what had been done.

A great quantity of pieces of new rock was lying around, and Brett began gathering them up, or some of them, and throwing them in a heap.

"Here you are," he remarked, "almost half a ton of it. Take your choice of samples, and I hope you will find them so rich that you'll sell the whole piece for us. Got enough, you say?"

"Yes, more than enough," was the answer.

"I couldn't ask a fairer showing than you have made, Mr. Brett, and it's hardly worth the while to assay the ore; but it has to be done, of course. Shall we return?"

"Just as you say, sir."

"Well, I'm ready. Let's go and get out of this smoke."

There had been much more conversation all around, of course, but of no interest to us.

Making their way back to the shaft, the four climbed to the top, and there the expert took a look at his specimens by sunlight.

He was highly pleased with them, and so expressed himself. It would not be necessary, he thought, to look further, and he was sure the sale of the mine would follow his report.

Going then to the Sweetheart, a sample or two was taken from there, and the expert retired to his room at the hotel to test them.

He was still at work when, shortly after noon, there came a rap at the door of his room.

"Come in!" he called out.

The door opened and John Hinyon entered.

Royland remembered him immediately as a man he had seen at the Sweetheart.

"I am John Hinyon," the visitor announced, "superintendent at the Letson lode. I have come here secretly for a private word with you."

"That so?" spoke the expert, in somewhat of surprise. "Sit down. What is it you have to say?"

"Have you assayed the ore from the Wonder?"

"Yes, and I find it excellent, fully as good as that from the Sweetheart, with which I am about done now."

"I believe it is fully as good, sir; no better and no worse. The fact of the business is, every sample you have here came from the Sweetheart lode."

The expert paled, and looked really silly for a second.

"You—you can't mean it?" he gasped.

"Yes, I do mean it. That mine was salted, and you have been imposed upon in the worst manner."

"Why, my dear sir, I can hardly believe that. I selected these specimens myself, in a haphazard manner, right from the solid rock. There was no chance for a deception."

"Well, you are best judge of that, but I know what I am talking about, and I have come here to give you a friendly tip in order that you might not be imposed upon and so ruined for life in your business prospects."

"How do you know this?" Royland asked excitedly.

"I know the ore was taken from the Sweetheart last night, and I explored the Wonder early this morning and found it there."

"It seems impossible. Tell me how I have been duped. I fail to see it, and unless you can show me I cannot pin much faith to what you have said."

"Well, as I was not along with you, of course it will be impossible to tell you just *how* it was done, but I may offer a guess or two. Perhaps you gave Mr. Brett leave to take the specimens from any point he pleased. At the end of the drift was a heap of old ore, with the new from the Sweetheart hid away under it. A charge of powder would soon bring the new out on top in fine style—"

"Stop! that is enough!" cried the expert. "I see it now, and I will look into this thing further."

"It is nothing to me," added Hinyon, "but I could not see you fooled without warning you. Please do not let out who told you. I have come here by the back way, in order not to be seen."

"I'll say nothing about you, sir, I promise."

"Very well."

Hinyon went out and away at once, while the young expert sat down and tried to think it all out.

Was it possible that he had been duped on so grand a scale as this? It was hard to believe, and it took all the pride and self-esteem out of him.

"I'm nothing but a braying ass, after all," he cried, bringing his fist down upon the table. "They have made a fool of me in the easiest way imaginable. But, I'll show them yet!"

Clearing up the dirt he had made, removing his overalls and jacket and washing up, he was ready for dinner when the alarm was sounded.

At the table he met Brett, who was eager to know how he had made out with his work, and what the result had been. Don Danton, Woolfe Nathan, and many others were present.

"Yes, I'm all done," Royland made answer to Brett's inquiry, "but I'm not quite satisfied yet."

"Not satisfied?" and a look of surprise, if not, indeed, alarm, appeared on the manager's face. "Why, what's wrong?"

"Well, there was too much of a sameness about the samples," the expert answered. "I expected to find some difference in the ore from different parts of the tunnel."

"Is that so? Well, it will be easy to fix that, sir. We will go down again, and you may select a hundred specimens, from as many different places. I'm bound to satisfy you if I can."

"Yes, we'll go down again to-morrow morning," Royland proposed.

He was watching Brett narrowly, without appearing to do so, and saw that he drew a breath of relief at this.

"To-morrow?" Brett quickly repeated. "Why not this afternoon? But, of course you are tired and have had enough of it for one day. To-morrow let it be."

"Judging by my work so far," the expert then went on, "I think it is safe to say the ore of the Wonder is fully as good as that of the Sweetheart. In fact, I could find no difference between them."

As he said this he looked Brett full in the face.

That gentleman met his gaze without waver, cheerfully responding:

"I was sure of it, sir. I knew the Wonder was as good as any of them. Hope your next assay will pan even better. We'll make it a thorough one, anyhow."

And so, for the time being, the matter was dropped.

After dinner was over, Brett and Nathan went off in the direction of the Sweetheart, talking earnestly together.

The afternoon passed without excitement of any kind so far as concerned those in whom we have interest, and evening came on, the night opening for another round of the usual pleasure and dissipation incident to mining life.

CHAPTER XIII.

DETECTIVE DON IS LET INTO THE SECRET.

TOM TRUMP, having found that he was out of place at the Merry Monarch, had taken up his quarters at one of the other hotels.

After supper he went over to the Monarch for the purpose of seeing his employer, and found him in the bar-room enjoying a cigar, for the moment alone. He seemed glad to see his man Trump.

"Hello, Tom, here you are, eh?" he greeted.

"You did not tarry very long at this hotel."

"No," Tom responded, as he sat down; "too

darn high-toned fer a feller of my plain cloth and homely ways. I couldn't hold up my end, so I dropped out. But, I have come over to have a talk with ye, boss."

"Want to see me, eh? Well, we are alone here, or nearly so, for the present; go ahead and say what you have to say."

"All right; and ef we git interrupted you kin ask me up to yer room, fer I think what I have got ter tell is somethin' important."

"Very well, I'll do that."

They were seated at a table, and Tom laid his arms upon it and leaned forward so as to speak in low tones.

"Have ye found that 'ar paper?" he asked.

"You haven't learned something about that, have you?" was the counter question.

"No; and I take et from that ye haven't heerd anything about et yerself. Et is mighty queer what became of et."

"No, I haven't seen or heard from it yet. It is deuced queer, as you say. I cannot understand it. That is not the only queer thing about it, however."

"Is that so? What else is in ther wind?"

"Why, that fellow that dumped me last night has not been seen since, and no one here knows him. He was a stranger, it seems, one who had never been seen before, far as I can learn."

"That is mighty strange, sure enough. What do ye make out of et?"

"It puzzles me. Do you suppose he was after that paper?"

"Which is ter say—do I suppose he got et? That's hard ter tell. Anyhow, that needn't trouble *you*, boss, as long as you have got the mine."

"Ha! ha! I don't know but what you are right, Tom. This, however, is not what you had in mind to say to me, is it?"

"No, et ain't. You have said you didn't come here with the intention of doin' any detective work."

Delicate Dan started.

"What do you mean now, Tom?" he demanded.

"Why, just what I say. That's what you said, ain't et?"

"Well, yes, that's what I have said, and it's about so. But, why?"

"Nothin', only I have got a little case fer ye, if ye want to work et up and unmask a bit of rascality that's goin' on."

"Is that so?" with interest. "What is it?"

"It's regardin' that Wonder Mine."

"Yes? What about it?"

"Fraud."

"A fraud! It don't appear so, from what the expert says."

"The expert be darn! They have put dust in his eyes, and he can't see half-way around the corner."

"Explain yourself, Tom; you are talking in riddles."

"Well, what I mean sums up to jest this: That Wonder Mine ain't no good, but it has been salted fer all it'll bear, with ore from our mine, and Brett and Nathan are the rascals at ther bottom of et all."

"You amaze me!" in genuine surprise.

"Didn't you s'pect et?"

"No."

"That's queer. I thought sure *you* would smell ther mice and git onto et."

"Are you *sure* of what you say? Perhaps you are mistaken. It is quite a serious charge to make, you know."

"Oh, I'm sure enough! I'm onto et, and so is John Hinyon. If you want ther proof, we'll jest watch 'em ter-night, fer I think they'll dose et some more."

"You surprise me. Where did you learn all this?"

"Why, by keepin' my eyes and ears wide open. They can't fool Tom Trump much about minin' tricks."

"Well, well, this is something worth looking into. I had no idea of doing any detective work here; but, since it comes right under my nose I can't help it."

"And I'd like no better fun than comin' in fer a share of et," Trump declared, in excited manner.

"But, this is something new in my line, Tom, and I hardly know how to go at it."

"Well, ther proof is what ye want first, and ther way ter get that, I should say, is ter watch and see et done."

"True enough. You seem to have some ideas about detective work yerself. I won't mention it to any one till we get the case in our hands."

"That's ther idee, I should say."

"And then we'll spring the trap on them, eh?"

"You are the boss; I don't p'tend ter know anything in sech matters."

"I know; but this is your case and I'm willing to let you have the say about it, you see."

"Well, then, suppose we hold on and see what the expert will do about it. I am of ther opinion that he smells a mice somewhere and wants ter find out jest where et is."

"Why do you think that?"

"Cause he wasn't satisfied with ter-day's work."

"How came you to know that, Tom?"

"Same as I know t'other—by keepin' my eyes and ears open. I tell ye they don't fool Tom Trump much about minin' fairs, ef I do say et myself."

"I begin to believe you are right."

"Ye see he had every chance ter prove ther mine ter-day, and his samples assayed high, they tell me. Ef he hadn't some s'picious he'd be satisfied, wouldn't he? I sh'd reckon so."

"It does look that way, true enough. I am glad you opened my eyes to this thing, Tom. Now I'll tell you what you do."

"And what's that?"

"You keep your eyes open and learn all you can, and I'll remain in the background and pretend to know nothing about it. See?"

"That will do fer ter-night; but ef you expose ther leetle game et won't do fer me to push forward. You are Delicate Don, and you must be the one at the head of ther class, not Tom Trump."

"I see you have right ideas, Tom. Well, we'll learn what we can to-night, and act accordingly."

There was further talk, and while they were still in conversation a boy came in and asked the man at the bar for Mr. Danton.

Delicate Don heard the inquiry and stepped forward at once.

"What is wanted of Mr. Danton?" he asked.

"I'm the man."

"Here's a message for you, sir," said the boy, giving him a sealed letter.

Don tore it open in haste, and found it was from Lamia Letson, who desired him to come to the cottage as soon as convenient.

"Do you want an answer?" he asked the boy.

"I was told ter bring a answer if you couldn't come," the boy responded.

"Then it's all right, and you needn't go back, for I'll go at once. If any one asks for me, landlord, tell him I'll be back in an hour or so."

"All right, sir."

Stepping to where Tom Trump sat, then, he told him where he was going, and bade him say nothing to anybody concerning what they had been talking about.

Tom nodded his head knowingly, and Danton went out, and when he had disappeared Tom nodded his head more knowingly still.

When the sport detective reached the cottage he found there John Hinyon, in the sitting-room with Lamia.

"You were prompt to come, Mr. Danton," the young lady said, graciously. "Be seated, please; I have something important to tell you."

The detective sat down, and after some trivial remarks Lamia came to the point.

"Talking with Mr. Hinyon," she said, "he let out something which, the next moment, he seemed to regret he had told me. It is concerning some irregularity that is going on at the mine."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I wanted him to tell you, but he said no; for since he had reported it to the manager he could not do more than that. I have taken it upon myself to send for you and tell you, for I have a suspicion that Mr. Nathan is concerned in the matter."

Forthwith, then, she told him concerning the taking of ore from the Sweetheart to "salt" the worthless Wonder.

CHAPTER XIV.

REVEALS DANTON'S PLANS.

THE new proprietor of the Sweetheart listened attentively to the end, when he turned to Hinyon.

"You say you have told Mr. Nathan about this, Mr. Hinyon?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir; I have told him," was the reply.

"What did he say? He has not told me."

"Now, sir, I am in a bad situation. It was a slip of the tongue when I let out knowledge of this matter to Miss Letson, and I should not bear tales to you concerning my superior. I hope you will not question me."

"I must insist upon an answer to my question, sir," urged the detective, sternly.

"Well, then, he told me, in effect, to mind my own business. He said he would attend to the matter."

"Then I will see him about it. I will not let on how the information came to me. You need not trouble yourself further about it, Mr. Hinyon."

"I had no intention of doing so."

"And, I will not meddle with the affairs of the Wonder. They will not trouble the Sweetheart again, you may rely on that."

There was further talk on the matter, and Danton took his leave.

"Things are getting interesting here," the detective mused, as he went back to the hotel. "I wonder if just here isn't a chance for me to make a stake out of this mining business. Let me see how it stands."

"Here are men anxious to invest in a mine; the Wonder is the mine they are after; and it isn't worth a pinch of snuff. If that state of affairs is exposed, what will hinder me from selling out the Sweetheart at a good round figure to the same parties?"

"By the lord Harry! I believe it is just my chance. I must work it, too, and make hay while the sun shines. I am going to get rid of the mine sooner than I thought, if I manage things right. What do I want with a mine, anyhow? My little game is going to work like a charm, if I handle it right. But, what of Nathan?"

He was thoughtful.

"He is not in it," he soon decided. "If he is implicated in the fraud, this will be my time to dispose of him for good. He'll have to suffer, that is all. Ha! ha! Don Danton did not come here with the idea of doing detective work, but it seems he has got to turn his hand to it anyhow. There will be a surprise for somebody when the exposure is made—"

He broke off suddenly and was thoughtful again.

"I won't have to do anything, however," he reflected. "If the expert finds out the cheat, and he is in a fair way for it, that will settle the business, and no doubt the fellows, afraid of arrest, will get out as soon as they can. Then will be the time for me to bring the Sweetheart to the notice of the capitalists, and there is no doubt but they will buy it. Don Danton, you are in luck, sure enough."

Reaching the hotel, he found his man Trump where he had left him.

"What do you suppose was wanted, Trump?" he said, taking his seat at the table again.

"If I knowed where ye have been, I might give a guess," was the man's reply to the question.

"Well, it was Miss Letson who sent for me, and she wanted to give me the same information you had just disclosed to me."

"That was et, eh? Then I s'pose Hinyon told her. Hinyon is ruther sweet in that direction."

"I see he is. You seem to know a little of everything about Kickapoo, Tom, short as has been your time here."

"Et's by keepin' my eyes and ears open, as I told ye, boss."

"I believe you. Keep right on keeping them open, for it won't do any harm for us to know what is going on."

"Not a bit. Well, what are ye goin' ter do about et, boss?"

"Why, I've been thinking it over, Tom, and I don't believe it'll be necessary for us to do any thing."

"You think ther expert will expose ther thing and that'll be ther end of et, do you?"

"I see you are a shrewd fellow, Tom. Yes, that is the idea."

"Well, mebbly he will; but I doubt et."

"What do you mean now?"

"I mean jest this: That young feller has got ter stand a test."

"I don't understand you. What are you getting at now? Won't he have a plain case?"

"Ther plainest kind of a case, and that's jest where et will come in. When they find he's got 'em on ther hip they'll try ter buy him off, and I opine they'll offer big money."

"Hal now I get your meaning. You are up in mining matters, and no getting around that. You have an idea, then, that he won't be able to resist the temptation, I take it. Am I right?"

"That's et. If ther offer is big enough, that young feller is goin' ter take et and give a false report, or I miss my guess. I kin sort o' see et in his eye. Bad thing fer him ter do, but I'm afeard he'll give way and do et."

"And in that case—"

"That's et. In th t case, you will have ter chip in and show 'em up."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to see the young

man and let him know we are aware how matters stand?"

"That might work, and force him to be honest; but, et would be better ter let him stand on his own bottom, I think. He'll be more ther man ef he don't fall."

"You are right. Well, we'll let matters take their own course, then, and act according to circumstances after awhile. You are a good fellow, Tom, and a big help to me. I'll see that you are taken care of."

"Et ain't fer me ter ask questions of you, boss," Tom now remarked, "but I'm sort o' curious on some p'int."

"You are welcome to ask as many questions as you like," the detective gave permission.

"Wull, then, are you goin' ter give up detective work and settle down ter minin' in this place? Seems ter me et wouldn't be easy ter do."

"No, Tom, I have no idea of doing that at all. I have been thinking it all over, and I believe I'll sell out as soon as I can and wind the business up. There will be a handsome fortune for Miss Letson."

"And for you too, eh?"

"Yes; for I am to have half of everything."

"Mebby you have somethin' in mind now. But, I don't ask ye."

"Yes, I have, Tom. I don't mind telling you, either. If these men don't buy the Wonder, and of course I'll see to it that they don't, I think I'll offer them the Sweetheart. They may send as many experts as they wish to examine that."

"I was of ther opine you would see that," Trump declared. "I was goin' ter put et inter yer head, if ye didn't."

"Much obliged, Tom; but it is not much that gets away from the notice of Don Danton."

"I kin believe ye in that, from what I have heard of ye."

So they continued, till presently they were joined by others, Nathan, Brett, Royland, etc.; when Tom Trump took his leave and sought his own hotel and more congenial company.

The hour was late and the camp for the most part in darkness, when the sport detective stole out of the hotel and joined his man Trump at a place of rendezvous that had been agreed upon.

From this point they made off in the direction of the Wonder Mine, the lead being taken by Tom Trump, who advanced with all the skill of a veteran scout; and after him went Danton, admiring his manner of working and appreciating his worth.

Finally a point was reached where they were safe from discovery by any who were likely to come that way, and here they stopped.

Not a great while later two other men came out from the camp, stopping at the shaft.

It was too dark to recognize them, of course, but their identity was readily guessed, and they were set down as Woolfe Nathan and Austin Brett.

The guess was a correct one.

A few moments' pause at the top, and they descended the shaft and all was still.

Not long had they been gone when another personage came out of the camp and drew near the shaft with stealthy steps.

This man, as was rightly guessed, was Howard Royland.

Reaching the shaft, he leaned over and peered down for a long time, using his eyes and ears to all the advantage he could.

Satisfied at last, he drew silently away and returned to the camp, and when he was out of sight and sound Danton and his man Trump came forward to the shaft and took his place.

What they saw and heard gave them all the proof they needed. Two men were below, and an occasional sight of them revealed that they were the ones suspected, Nathan and Brett. And ears and eyes speedily took in what they were doing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EXPERT SELLS OUT.

NEXT morning Howard Royland made his appearance from the hotel prepared for another excursion into the Wonder.

Austin Brett met him cordial and smiling, and insisted upon his having something to drink, or at any rate a smoke, before they set out.

Royland accepted a cigar, and together they made their way into the mine, this time unaccompanied by any others. Royland had an air of determination that made Brett uneasy.

Brett furnished a light as before, and handing the torch to Royland, took up the pick.

"Now," said he, "let's begin right here at the opening and take samples all the way along. I'll give you as many as you want."

As he spoke, Brett stood facing a corner of the tunnel on the right, ready to strike.

"Try it here," directed Royland, indicating a spot on the other side. "We had specimens from that side yesterday."

"On that side," explained Brett, the change nettling him, "the lode has been worked down to pretty near bare rock. It is on this side and at the end that it is in its beauty."

"Oh, well, it can't make much difference," Royland gave way. "Suppose you try it right here."

As he spoke he laid his hand on a projection a couple of feet from where Brett had intended striking.

"Look here," Brett cried. "What is the matter with you?"

"Why, nothing," Royland declared. "Why don't you knock off a specimen?"

"Do you think this claim is loaded for you? Do you suspect we have been salting it down?"

"I'll begin to think something of the sort, if you don't go ahead," was the cool return.

Brett muttered a curse and made an attack upon the point indicated.

A piece was soon knocked off, Brett stooping at the same moment to pick it up.

Royland was watching him, and discovered that he did not pick up the piece he had knocked off, but another that lay near it.

"This is the one," Royland said, stooping and getting it himself.

"You're mistaken," Brett disputed. "This is the one. Don't you suppose I saw it fall?"

"So did I, too. Go on and we'll get some more. I'll take enough specimens to make a thorough job of it this time."

Brett soon made another effort to strike a point that had been fixed for the purpose, but Royland would not have it so, and demanded the pick himself.

"Well, take it, if you think you can do any better," Brett growled; and he surrendered it.

Royland went ahead, then, knocking off chips here and there, till the end of the tunnel was reached, where he added as many more to the stock in his bag.

"There, that will do, I guess," he said. "We'll go back to the hotel, and I'll give it a good test and decide upon the whole by the samples I have taken this time."

"Curse you!" grated Brett, "who put you onto this thing?"

"What thing?"

"You needn't play the innocent, for you know well enough."

"If you will explain what you are talking about, I may be able to answer you. What has come over you, anyhow, Mr. Brett?"

"Oh, well, come on and we'll go back. I'll meet you in your room after a little while."

He turned and went back to the shaft, Royland following, and they climbed out into daylight once more. They had visited the Wonder for the last time.

They parted there, Royland going straight to the hotel while Brett went off in another direction.

From the window of his room Royland could see in the direction of the Wonder and the Sweetheart, and in the course of twenty minutes he saw Brett come out of the office of the Sweetheart.

A short time later there was a knock at the door, and opening it he admitted Brett into the room.

"Well, how does it assay this time?" was the question.

"I haven't tried it," Royland answered.

"Haven't tried it?"

"Exactly. What's more, I'm not going to try it. I can see plainly enough there is nothing in it."

Brett smiled in a sickly way, but the smile soon disappeared and a look of firmness took its place.

"I see the little game is up, Royland," he said. "Tell me who it was put you onto the thing. I want to know, just for satisfaction."

"If any one had told me," was the return, "I would not tell you. What I know I saw with my own eyes last night between one o'clock and three."

"You don't mean it!" Brett cried.

"I do mean it, too," was the retort. "You thought you had closed my eyes nicely, yesterday, but I know my business. I shall have to report the mine for what it is worth."

"You won't do anything of the kind," cried Brett. "We want to have you report according to the assay you made yesterday, and you

can do it just as well as not. I am going to make it an object to you, if you'll do it."

"But, I can't do it. My reputation is at stake."

"A fig for your reputation. Money is what we are after in this world, isn't it?"

"Well, money comes in handy as we go along, but I want my money to come to me honestly or I don't want it at all."

"That's all very well in a story book, but you are not the fellow to fling ten thousand dollars over your shoulder, are you? I reckon not."

"Ten thousand dollars!"

"Not a cent less. You report in our favor, so that we can sell the mine, and that sum is yours. It will fix you for life, don't you see?"

"I see there is danger that it may fix me in another way. I don't think I will bite. No; I've got to report the mine as it is, and there's no getting around it."

"Nonsense! You can report the facts of the case, just as they happened, and you will be freed from all blame. You found the ore in the Wonder, and that was the ore you assayed. You did not see it put there. I'll make it fifteen thousand to you."

Royland was pale, and his face twitched.

"It would come out," he protested, "and then where would I be?"

"What if it did come out; they couldn't prove that you knew anything about it."

"Yes; but I do know all about it, and that's where the pain lies. I can't do it, and that settles it."

"No, it don't settle it, either. I am bound to have you report this thing just as you found it yesterday. You have got the bulge on us somehow, but we are willing to buy off."

"I can't do it."

"We'll give you twenty thousand dollars cash."

Royland was as pale as death, and trembled from head to foot. It was the temptation of his life.

"Twenty thousand dollars, and in good hard cash," Brett urged. "You can afford to give up your business and strike out anew in some other place. You will never get another chance like it in the world."

The expert hesitated, and—"He who hesitates is lost."

"Do you mean it?" he asked. "Will you give me the money cash down?"

"Yes, cash down, just as soon as we can get it. Perhaps it will be to-night. What do you say to it?"

"Pl do it."

"All right. But, we can't do this without some security. You'll have to leave us your word in writing that you will carry out your part faithfully."

"I'll do that, too. Now that I'm in for it, I'm in for it up to the neck. Bring on the money and I'll give you my bond. I want the cash in hand, however, or it's no deal; don't forget that."

"I won't. It's a bargain, and all understood. When I go out I'll report the thing as settled, and that the assay has proved the mine to be all we claim for it. It is not generally known that it is a fake, and you'll be all safe in the matter. I don't want you to go back on us."

"I won't. Twenty thousand dollars is no small sum, and not to be picked up in a day. Besides, these men are nothing to me."

CHAPTER XVI.

DANTON CONSULTS TOM TRUMP.

BRETT, however, said nothing till dinner time, when he asked Royland openly how he had made out with the second assay.

The answer was to the effect that it was perfectly satisfactory, and that he had no doubt but the sale of the mine would speedily follow his report.

Detective Danton eyed the young man as he said this, but Royland was perfectly cool about it, evidently determined to brave the thing out and so win the money promised him.

"When do you return to Denver, Mr. Royland?" Danton presently asked.

"By the stage to-morrow, I suppose," was the answer. "Anything I can do for you there, sir?"

"No, I guess not," the rejoinder. "I merely asked for something to say, as it were. If you have opportunity, don't fail to mention the Sweetheart, in money circles."

"I'll do that, with pleasure, sir, after the sale of the Wonder. It would be unfair to the owners of that mine to mention it before."

"Of course."

During the afternoon the sport detective called upon Miss Letson.

"I have come," he said, "to have a little talk with you regarding business matters."

"You are heartily welcome, I am sure," was the sweet reply of the sad-faced girl, whose eyes still showed her weeping.

"I shall be able to make changes in the mine earlier than I thought. This is to be Mr. Nathan's last day there, and to-morrow Mr. Hinyon will be promoted to his place."

"Oh! I am glad of that. That will be as poor papa would have arranged it, had he not met with the fatal accident he did. It will be good for Mr. Hinyon, for I know he is deserving and also capable."

"I know he is capable, for I can see that the success of the mine has been his work since your father let go. From all accounts he has been there early and late, and has done his very best, Nathan getting most of the credit for it. I can see how it has been."

"I am glad you can, sir, and that justice is going to be done."

"You do not ask why Nathan is going to be removed."

"True; though I am eager to know. It slipped me for the moment."

"I will tell you: It is because he is implicated in the fraud that is in progress concerning the Wonder."

"Oh, I was sure of that."

"Well, we have got the proof of it, and to-night I am going to arrest him; as I have the power to do, you know."

"Then have they blinded the expert, after all, so that he will report favorably upon the mine?"

"Why, the rascal has sold out to them, soul and body."

"My! How could he do things like that?"

"The world is full of such fellows. But, I was going to propose something to you, Miss Letson?"

"What is it?"

"Well, it is this: Here are capitalists with a barrel of money, so to say, looking for investment, and when the Wonder fails them they will turn elsewhere. Would it not be a good idea to sell the Sweetheart to them?"

"Do you think it would?"

"I certainly do. I have been thinking the matter over carefully, and I have come to that conclusion."

"What reason do you advance for that conclusion? You must have reached it by a process of reasoning that has shown in its favor, sir."

"You say it exactly, Miss Letson. This camp, as you will agree, is now enjoying its boom, and is probably at its highest point, in spite of all that is said about its future."

"You may be right."

"I know I am right. We have seen such examples hundreds of times, at any rate I have. There is a larger population here now than the mines will support, and perhaps some of the other mines will soon follow the fate of the Wonder. If not, company rule will reduce pay, and as a consequence the camp must decline."

"There is reason in that, certainly."

"Of course there is. It is sound reasoning, too. My belief is that the Sweetheart will bring a larger price just now than it will ever bring again, and if you hold fast to it, it may suddenly peter out. Even if it does not, it will have to compete with other mines run as stock concerns, with millions to back them, and must be the loser. I have nearly made up my mind to sell."

"And you want me to favor the action before you do so?"

"Well, yes, perhaps so. I thought I would mention it to you, anyhow, and let you think it over."

"Thank you. I will think it over carefully, and will let you know my wishes, although I have expressed them once already."

"I know you have, and that is holding me back a good deal. Still, your father trusted everything to my judgment, and I must do what I think is for the best."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You see your father was wise in what he did. He made my interest and your own identical. He knew I would manage the mine for my own good, naturally, and in that way your benefit was assured."

"Yes, it does look that way, true. He had always told me half the property was mine, no matter what happened to him."

"Had he a will prepared?" eagerly.

"No; though he meant to have one. In that case I would have come in for all of it, as I believe."

"Too bad he could not have made one, then. But, he thought he would get well, poor man."

and knew that he could trust me until he did recover. However, I have no intention of taking a full half, Miss Letson."

"Oh, yes; you must take just whatever papa desired you to have."

"No; a quarter, or less, will repay me, if we sell out early. If I work it, and give my time, that will be different."

"Of course."

When, finally, Danton took his leave, he went to the mine, where he remained till the close of the day, when he returned to the hotel.

After supper he sought his man Trump at the hotel where he was staying, and entered into conversation with him regarding the events that were crowding forward to a climax.

"Well," he remarked, "our man did take the bribe, just as you thought he was likely to do, Tom."

"He did, eh? I was 'most sure he would, by ther look in his off eye. Now is your time to bring them to a stop, then."

"You seem to forget that it's your case, Tom."

"Oh, that be darn, boss; Don Danton don't want no meddlin' from a feller o' my caliber."

"But, I want to do it in your way, so that it can be called your case out and out, as it really is. What would you do?"

"Darn et, Danton, don't expect me ter go ahead. I don't know B from bull's foot about detective work. All you have ter do is ter get 'em together at ther hotel, and we'll scoop 'em."

"There, that's what I wanted to get out of you. You have better ideas about detective work than you think you have."

"You'll make me think I'm a whole batch of Government detectives, ef ye keep on."

Tom Trump seemed to swell with not a little pride, under all this liberal praise.

"You might become something in that line, if you were to put yourself down to it."

"Haw! haw! haw! You make me larf, Mr. Danton. But, ef et wouldn't be presumin' too much I might give ye a hint or two that's come inter my sleepy noodle."

"What are they? You did well enough before in the pointers you gave me."

"And et's on ther same line ergain, too."

"Then let me hear it, by all means."

"Well, when you have blocked this hyar leetle game, why not send fer these moneyed men ter come hyar, with ther main idee in sight ter identify ther prisoners, or anyhow Royland; but really ter bring ther Sweetheart to their notice."

"Tom, you're a trump in fact."

"I have to own ter that, sence that's my name. But, don't ye think it would be a good plan? And et would work, too."

"Yes; but would they come?"

"Come! Bet your life on't they'd come. Your name is known in Denver, and et would fetch 'em fast enough."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of et. You jest try et on, and see ef et don't."

CHAPTER XVII.

MAKING THE ARREST.

THE sport detective seemed to approve of Tom Trump's plans in everything he suggested.

"I'll tell you what it is, Tom," he observed, presently. "If I take to the trail again after I get done here, I'll take you with me. What do you say to that?"

"Et would jest suit me," was the response. "I never thort I was cut out fer a detective, but darn me ef thar ain't somethin' sort o' drawin' about et. I'll be with ye, ef ve want me."

"Then it's understood so."

"So be et. But, we'd better finish our plans about scoopin' these hyar mean cusses, hadn't we?"

"Certainly. What do you think is the best way?"

"Thar's some leetle p'int's that I haven't laid out to ye, yet, boss."

"That so? What are they?"

"You'll begin ter think I'm a reg'lar Peter Pry, or whatever his name was; but I can't help keepin' my eyes 'n' ears open any more'n I kin help eatin'."

"That bespeaks the detective ability, I should say."

"Mebby et do; but I allus thort et was darn meddlin' in what didn't consarn me."

"But, what was the point?"

"Well, I hev seen arrests made afore, and you've made a many a one in your time. They allus demands ther proof, don't they?"

"Almost invariably, Tom."

"Jest so; and they'll do et this time."

"No doubt about it."

"And you'll want et to poke right under their noses."

"Certainly."

"Have ye got et?"

"Why, yes; didn't we see and hear what was going on at the mine last night?"

"Ter be sure; and thar's Hinyon, he kin be fetched in ter swear to et, too; but, ye may as well hold as good a hand as ye kin git."

"Of course. What more do you know?"

"Well, jest this hyar: This afternoon that man Brett went to Royland's room and paid him twenty thousand dollars in cash money, all in big bills, and the youngster has got et stowed away in two packages inside his shirt."

"You amaze me, Tom. How did you get onto this?"

"Oh, ther same old way, same as I've told ye afore."

"It seems impossible."

"But et's ther fact jest ther same. And, that ain't all, either, boss!"

"What more?"

"Why, he made Royland sign a paper, statin' that for ther sum of twenty thousand he was to make a false report of ther condition of ther mine. And, that ain't quite all yet."

"Tom, you are bewildering me. How much do you know?"

"Et don't matter how much I b'wilder ye, so long as I am on your side in ther case and we're goin' ter scoop 'em. As ter what I know, et ain't much. But, hyar's ther next p'int: That 'ar paper is drawn up in Nathan's handwritin', and that will nail him deader'n a ghost!"

"Tom Trump, you are just the man I want to tie to, as the boys say."

"All right, boss, tie to me jest as hard as ye please; but, them is facts, and facts are what yanks ther plum."

"You are right. As I have told you, Tom, I didn't come here with the idea of doing any detective work, and so haven't given any attention to it. If I had been looking for such things, of course I would have had these points myself."

"Sartain; I understand that well enough. Ye would 'a' had more, too, fer I don't know nothin' about ther biz. Et's only blind luck that puts 'em in my way. Thar is nothin' of science about my way of gettin' at things. But, yer see how et is now: ye have got ther game right in your own hands."

"I see I have. The proof can't be doubted, and we'll have them. You must be on hand to back me up, however, when I arrest them."

"Never fear but I'll be thar. Ef we are to be pards, you'll find your Trump on hand every time you want ter use him."

When their talk ended, Danton went back to the Merry Monarch, where he found Nathan, Brett, and Royland, all in a jolly mood and enjoying some wine and cigars at a table.

He was immediately invited to join them, which he did.

Brett and Nathan were jubilant over the report the expert had made of the Wonder Mine.

They had treated the whole house once, or at any rate Brett had done so, for Nathan did not appear too openly concerned in the matter.

After a little time they adjourned to the gaming room, where they began playing at one of the tables, for small sums at first, but gradually growing bolder as their excitement increased.

If Royland had been an older man than he was, or rather if he had been a wiser and better posted young man, he would have seen through this scheme.

Brett and Nathan were trying, if possible, to win back the greater part of the money they had paid over to him that afternoon!

While they were playing, Tom Trump came into the room and looked idly on for a little while, interested.

He stood facing Danton, and behind Brett and Nathan.

Royland seemed to be the loser. He occasionally won a trifle, but not enough to balance his losses.

Brett and Nathan, too, were dropping behind, slowly, while Danton was winning steadily right along, a fact which seemed to trouble them greatly.

Finally Royland went broke.

"I'll have to stop, gentlemen," he announced.

"My pile is gone."

"Nonsense!" cried Brett. "You can rake up some more somewhere. We haven't half begun to play yet."

"That's so," supported Nathan. "Come, draw on your reserve fund, young man, and see if you can't recover your loss. It won't do for one to stop loser."

"Besides," added Brett, "we must try to

square accounts with Mr. Danton here, who seems to be getting everything."

Danton had caught Tom Trump's eye, or Tom had caught his, and a quiet signal was exchanged.

Drawing a brace of revolvers suddenly, and covering the trio, the sport detective exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, this thing has gone about far enough. Up with your hands, for you are my prisoners."

Royland turned as pale as death, and seemed on the point of fainting, but not so the other two. They paled, to be sure, but they made a spring to their feet, at the same time reaching for weapons.

In the same second each felt a cold tube pressed behind his ear, and a voice cried out:

"Gentle, now, me buckies, or you'll hear somethin' drop."

It was Tom Trump, and he had the best hand.

Danton was now upon his feet, his weapons to the fore, and again he ordered:

"Up with your hands, or the worse for you!"

"Bet your lives on et," echoed Trump. "My name is Trump, and I'm backed by a right bower and a joker."

Every man in the room was now upon his feet; all was excitement, and a crowd was rapidly forming around, eager to ascertain what it all meant.

"What in thunder is the meaning of this outrage?" cried Brett.

"That's what I demand," echoed Nathan.

"Somebody will suffer for this insult."

Royland was quiet, trembling and cowed. He had not risen out of his chair, and his face betrayed the fact that he knew what was coming.

"I'll tell you what it means," spoke up the detective. "It means that you are under arrest for attempt at defrauding some Denver capitalists out of a cool hundred thousand dollars."

"It's a lie!" cried Brett.

"It's the truth, and I can prove it," declared Danton. "Keep up your hands, or the worse for you!"

At first there had appeared to be a slight tremor in his tone, but it was now growing steady enough, and it was evident that he meant business.

The weapons of Tom Trump, too, were still to be felt behind the rascals' ears, and it was the part of wisdom for them to remain quiet as ordered, since there was no help for it.

"How are you going to prove it?" cried Brett.

"We have laid the whole mine open to the expert here, and he has tested it for what it is worth. You are making a great mistake, Mr. Detective Danton."

"Dan Danton does not make mistakes," was the retort. "I have got the proof on you fast enough, and you are my game. Men of Kickapoo, I call upon you in the name of the Government to secure these men, after which I will produce the proof for what I have asserted."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PROVING THE CASE AND CAGING THE BIRDS.

AT first no one offered to obey the call, for Brett and Nathan were men who had held great sway at Kickapoo.

"Gentlemen, I have the right to demand your help in this matter," the detective urged. "You had better do as I request, and so save further trouble."

"But, ther proof, whar is it?" asked Henry Bridgelow, or Hen Low, as he was called, the proprietor of the hotel. "It ain't askin' too much ter ask ther proof 'fore we goes inter this thing, is it?"

"I tell you the proof will be forthcoming immediately," was the assurance.

"Never mind any help," spoke up Tom Trump. "You hold 'em covered, Don Danton, and I'll soon fix 'em."

Putting away one of his own weapons, Tom deftly disarmed the three, and they were then helpless to do harm and were practically as secure as though bound.

"Thar ye have 'em," Tom cried. "Now show 'em up fer what they are, Delicate Don. I tell ye thar's no use tryin' ter kick over ther traces when Don Danton gits his grip onto ye, me lads."

"Look here, Don Danton," cried Nathan, now, "I demand to know what part I am in for in this matter. You ought to know that I am not in it."

"Beg your pardon, sir, but you *are* in it, and in it bad, too," the detective disputed.

"Show up ther proof," called out one man in the crowd.

"That's et!" others supported at once.

"Very well, gentlemen, if you are prepared

for it I will show them up in their true light. You will find that I am able to prove all that I bring against them."

"That is what we demand," cried Brett. "You have undertaken a serious thing, Don Danton, and if you don't make out a case against us we will make you sweat for it, you can depend on that."

"That is all right, sir. If you know anything about my reputation you must know that I am not in the habit of making mistakes. If you will hold your peace now I will soon set forth the particulars of the matter to the satisfaction of all."

Royland was still in his chair, pale and trembling.

"In the first place," the detective began, "I and my man know the Wonder Mine was salted, and we saw you when you fixed it. If you deny that, we are able to offer other witnesses to prove the fact. This man here," indicating Royland, "knew the same thing, the reason he demanded another test."

"On the second test you were not able to fool him, as on the first occasion, and the result was, he cornered you. It was then you offered him a bribe, and when you made it big enough he took the bait and swallowed it. This is the truth, gentlemen of Kickapoo, and they can't deny it."

"But, we do deny it," cried Brett.

"We defy you to prove anything of the kind," challenged Nathan.

"It is easily proved," was the cool response. "Mr. Royland here has the money on his person, now, while you, Mr. Brett, hold a paper which you made him sign at the time you paid him the twenty thousand dollars. Deny it if you can."

"I do deny it," Brett shouted.

Royland's head had dropped, and guilt was plainly seen in his manner.

"Can this be true?" cried Nathan, suddenly. "Have you been tricking me in this way, Austin Brett?"

The detective laughed.

"That little by-play won't serve you," he declared. "You are as deep in the mud as your partner is deep in the mire. I can prove this, too."

"Prove it then. I defy you to prove it!"

"Do you? The document Mr. Brett holds is in your handwriting. It was you who penned it, and you are as guilty as he."

This took Nathan somewhat aback. How had this detective managed to learn so much, when he and his accomplice had done everything with so much secrecy?

"You're a liar!" the man cried out.

The detective only smiled at that, while he made response:

"Is that the reputation of Don Danton?" he asked. "I hardly think so. You have heard what I charge, men of Kickapoo; let them disprove it if they can."

"On what terms will you let me off, Mr. Danton, if I confess to the whole business?" asked Royland.

"Curse you for an idiot!" cried Brett, viciously.

"I won't let you off at all," was the incisive response. "I have all the proof needed."

"And that's just as good as his confession," spoke up Tom Trump. "We have got 'em dead to rights, Master Don,—leastways you have; and we'll hold fast to 'em too, you bet!"

"Why don't ye show up ther proof?" demanded Hen Low.

"You can have it at once. Tom, take the paper from Mr. Brett's pocket, and let it be read aloud. I'll shoot him on the spot if he resists."

With a quick move Tom Trump thrust his hand in and drew out the paper in question.

It was handed to a man in the crowd, who read it aloud.

"You can't prove that against me," cried Nathan. "I deny it all. I never saw it before in my life."

"That won't do, sir," warned Danton. "Your handwriting at the office is the same as this, and it won't take long to compare the two. But, it is not necessary to do that."

"I admit it all, now," cried Royland. "I was a fool to give way to the temptation. It is all true—"

"Shut up, you fool!" snarled Brett.

"Et don't make any difference whether he shuts up or don't shut up, now," declared Tom Trump. "Donny Danton has got the bulge on ye, and ye have got ter go below, I should say."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Royland.

"I am going to hold you and send for the men who sent you here in their interests," was the response.

"That means that it is all up with me, then. Curse the miserable money that tempted me!"

"You should have cursed it before you accepted it, sir. That would have been more to the point. It is too late now."

"Shall I take the money from him, Mr. Danton, and show up all ther proof at onces?" asked Trump.

"Yes; take it from him and we will take charge of it," was the order.

Royland did not resist, but aided the man in getting at the money and bringing it to light.

"Is any further proof wanted?" the detective inquired.

"Should say not," spoke up Hen Low. "You seem ter have et all in one lump, Don Danton."

"Then what is to be done with such rascals?" was demanded. "Have you a jail here in Kickapoo that will hold them for a day or two?"

"Yes, thar is a jail hyar, and a good one," spoke up one fellow.

"That is all that is needed, then. By the power given me, I order them committed to the jail, there to await the arrival of the men they plotted against."

"And that 'ar means bind 'em," decided Tom Trump. "Ef ye know when ye are well off, men o' Kickapoo, ye won't make et necessary fer Donny ter ask ye more nor a dozen times ter help in this matter."

"You are right in saying that," added Don.

At that some men lent their aid, and the three were speedily bound and ready for the lock-up.

Danton's proof had been all that could be asked, and there was no room for further doubt regarding the guilt of the three conspirators.

Whatever help they might have had from friends, the very name of Don Danton checked, for it was a name that had become a terror to evil-doers of every class in a brief time.

"It seems all against us now," Brett spitefully declared, "but you will live to regret this, Don Danton."

"I am not likely to," was the retort.

"That is so," grated Nathan, "for you may be taken off suddenly before you have time to regret it."

"Can't you let me be a witness on your side, Mr. Danton?" urged Royland, eagerly.

"Don't need you," was the reply he got. "Our case is complete."

A good deal more was said all around, more than could be quoted were it even necessary; but it is not.

All being ready, the prisoners were conducted to the jail, where a guard was placed to see that no chance for escape was allowed the rascals.

That having been done, Danton and his man withdrew to the hotel of the latter for a further conference, and the hour was late when they separated for the night.

It is needless to say there was great excitement at Kickapoo, and the name of Don Danton was upon every lip.

CHAPTER XIX.

SPRINGING THE SURPRISE.

LITTLE has been said, for a considerable time, concerning Chin Chop and his youthful guardian.

Not because they were not worthy of mention has this been the case, but rather because other matter has demanded attention.

They were still at their hotel at Kickapoo, still carrying on their ridiculous farce, yet at the same time secretly doing the work of their master, Don Danton.

On the morning following the arrest of Brett, Nathan, and Royland, they made their appearance at the Monarch about the time the stage was ready to start, and booked themselves for passage.

This was a surprise, for Chin Chop had hired a shanty and had given out that he was about to open his den.

"What, not goin' ter git out, be ye, Chin Chop?" somebody demanded.

"Not for velly long," was the Celestial's response. "Go gittee stuff to open smokee shop. Soon back; then open ranch and have big time."

"And you're with him, Terry?"

"Bet yer galluses on it!" the Irish lad responded. "If I let him go alone he'd git so stavin' blind drunk, begob, dhat he wouldn't never foind his way back here again, and well he knows it, too."

"Allee samee Telly vely good boy," Chin Chop declared. "Me likee him vely much; use him like he my own son. Me be fathel to Telly,

long as he lives. Him be allee samee son to Chin Chop. Hey, Telly?"

"Bet yer life," cried Terry. "I'll be a son-of-a-gun to ye, Chopsey, av I ketch ye so much as lookin' crooked at any dark green bottle dhis trip."

"You lettee me takee one dlink 'fore we start, Telly?"

"Nixey. Nary a drop."

"Me givee you fifty cents, Telly."

"Not fur a dollar, Chopsey, old boy. You can't have any av Oi know mesel', and Oi t'ink Oi do."

So they kept it up till the stage was ready to start, when they were cheered out of the camp by the crowd assembled to see the stage off.

At the Sweetheart Mine some changes were made promptly.

John Hinyon was promoted to the office of manager, while Tom Trump was given charge as superintendent.

The prisoners at the jail were safe, and likely to remain so, for the guard was made up of picked men selected by Hinyon and Tom Trump together.

By the way, Tom Trump and John Hinyon seemed to have struck up a friendship early, for they were much together and seemed to like each other more than usually well for short acquaintances.

On this morning, too, Danton had sent a letter to the men who had employed Royland to examine the Wonder, bidding them come as soon as possible to identify the young man and appear against him. He signed his name in full to that letter, and told them to ask for him at the Merry Monarch when they arrived.

Other letters of importance went out by the same stage, but we will not stop to explain about them now.

"Well, everything seems to be working nicely," remarked Danton to Tom Trump, when they met that night after the mine had closed for the day.

"Bet yer life on that!" was the response.

"No reason why it shouldn't, either. We'll make a big showin' of ore by the time them fellers come, and I'll bet they'll snap at ther bait."

"Yes, I think they will, too. You see, they'll be under obligation to me, and they'll know there is no fake about our mine. I think I'll be able to sell out at a good round figure, Tom. That will wind up our business here."

Some days passed.

The situation remained unchanged for the three who were in jail.

One attempt had been made to rescue Brett and Nathan, but the guard had been more than equal to the emergency.

The two men had enemies in the camp as well as friends, and the guardsmen had been taken from among them, in order that there might be no treachery. And after the attempt at rescue the guard was doubled.

On the afternoon when the Denver capitalists were expected, the sport detective was at the hotel to meet them.

When the stage came it was noticed, as it came into the camp, that Chin Chop the Chinaman and Terry his young guardian were passengers on top.

The crowd greeted them with a cheer as the stage drew up and stopped.

"Allee samee come back, like bad dollal," greeted Chin Chop, with a broad grin.

"And Oi'm roight wid him, you bet," sung out Terry.

There were other passengers on top, and there seemed to be a goodly number inside.

Chin Chop, Terry, and the others got down, and at the same time the passengers inside were getting out.

The first to alight were two well-dressed men of middle age, whom the sport detective took at once to be the capitalists from Denver.

Following these was a younger man, who, when he had alighted, turned and assisted out a very old and very feeble man. The old man had long white hair and beard, and wore a shawl.

Somehow nobody appeared to be in a hurry. There was even less than the usual haste to get into the hotel on the part of the new arrivals. They looked around leisurely, and presently made their way up the steps and into the hotel.

A portion of the crowd followed, naturally, and more than the usual number, since it was known the men were expected who were to push the case against Royland and the other two conspirators. The young man, assisting the aged gentleman, was the first to enter, the others coming behind.

The sport detective followed in, awaiting for

some inquiry to be made for him before he made any advances. For some reason, too, Chin Chop and Terry entered, while Tom Trump and John Hinyon were in the rear.

The two well-dressed gentlemen looked leisurely around the room for a moment, but presently approached the bar and one of them asked:

"Is there a gentleman stopping here by name of Dona'd Danton, sir?"

"Thar is, sir," answered the proprietor. "That is him, right over thar, sir," indicating the man.

At this the detective stepped immediately forward, smiling blandly, and greeted the two strangers.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Messrs. Westerly and Hampkin?" he asked.

"We answer to those names, sir," was the bold response, "but we fail to recognize you."

Danton paled slightly, and seemed to grow confused.

"Why, I—I am Donald Danton," he declared. "I am the man who wrote to you and requested you to come here. I am a stranger to you, of course, and it—"

"Yes, you *are* a stranger, that is so," the spokesman for the two interrupted. "You certainly are not the Donald Danton whom we engaged to come here in our interest regarding the Wonder Mine—"

The detective was now as pale as death, and he interrupted brokenly:

"There—there is—there must be some mistake, gentlemen. I never engaged with you to come here in your interest regarding any mine. There is a misunderstanding somewhere. I came here on another business entirely. You have been imposed upon in some manner—"

"We might have been imposed upon, sir, had we not been too wary," was the cutting interruption. "We engaged Detective Don Danton to come here and watch over the testing of the Wonder Mine, not caring to trust entirely to Mr. Royland, the expert; and *you*, positively, are *not* the man. *You are an impostor, sir!*"

The accused man glanced around the room, particularly at the way of exit.

There were three doors leading from the apartment, and in each of these stood a person with a brace of revolvers in each.

At one door stood John Hinyon; at another stood the bland and innocent Celestial, Chip Chop; while at the third was young Terrence McCune, grinning broadly.

The sport was as pale as death now, greatly unlike Don Danton, and he reached out and laid a hand upon the bar for support. He tried to speak, but was unable to do so, and stood staring helplessly.

At this moment Tom Trump stepped to the front.

"Might I be allowed ter chip in a word jest hyar?" he asked.

"Yes, if you can give us any light upon this matter," answered one of the new arrivals.

"I ruther think I kin do that, sir. You say this man is *not* Don Danton, do ye?"

"Positively."

"Exactly! Would you know the real Don Danton if you saw him?"

"Certainly, sir. It is less than ten days ago since he was at our office in Denver."

"Then please say if *this* is the man."

With a quick movement Tom Trump removed his hat and snatched off hair and beard, and there stood forth the real Don Danton, Prince of Detectives, to confront the daring impostor!

CHAPTER XX.

DON TELLS HIS STORY.

THE excitement that prevailed was intense. The pretender staggered back, and would have fallen but for the hold he had upon the bar.

Here was something which none had suspected, and which none had known save the few Don had taken into his confidence.

It was a surprise even to the two gentlemen from Denver, for they had not been admitted fully into Don's scheme, though of course he had posted them regarding the imposture.

"Am I the man?" Don asked.

"Yes, you are the real Danton," was the smiling response.

It was then that the only original Don turned upon the cowering rascal who had deposed him, his keen eyes flashing.

"You despicable rascal!" he cried, pointing his finger at the man and speaking with scorn. "You thought to play the *role* of Don Danton, but have been overreached. I will now unmask you and show you up in your true colors."

Again the fellow looked at the doors, as if calculating his chances.

"Begob," sung out Terry, "an' ye come dhis way it's a subject fur a funeral ye will be, in short order!"

"Allee samee here too," chipped in Chin Chop. "Me gottee dlop on you, and me let dlive big double dose if you tly to gettee outee, you bettee."

"I need not warn you not to come this way," added John Hinyon.

The fellow was trapped.

"There is no escape for you, Ethan Fairday, you see. Don Danton does not do his work by halves, as you must be aware by this time. Oh, you may start at mention of your true name. I know you. I am guessing at nothing. Deny your identity if you can—if you *dare*."

"I do deny it," the fellow gasped. "I deny—"

"Helen Fairday, come forward and face this knave of knaves!" Don called.

A veiled woman had entered the room, unobserved save by few, and she now came to the front.

"Ethan Fairday," she cried, throwing back her veil and revealing a pale, sad face, "it is useless for you to deny who you are. I am your wife, and at last, thanks to the true Don Danton, I have found you."

The rascal hung his head.

"Yes, you are downed at last," said Don, "and now you shall sign the papers which will give this woman that which is hers by right. After that the law will deal with you, and you will find its grasp will not be gentle by any means."

Staggering to a chair, the man dropped into it, letting fall his head upon his arms on the table.

"Citizens of Kickapoo, some explanation is due you concerning the kick-up we have been making here. If you will give me your attention I will tell you the story in full, so that you may understand it all. First, however, I will do this."

With a single stride he was where the accused man sat, and a pair of handcuffs were snapped on his wrists.

"Some time ago," Don then resumed, "I was sent for by these gentlemen, Mr. Joseph Westerly and Mr. James Hampkin, and requested to come to their office at Denver. I went, and they engaged me to come to this place and investigate, quietly, the mine known as the Wonder. Not only that, but I was to see that their expert, Mr. Royland, gave them a true and honest report."

"Sending two able allies on in advance, these whom you have known here as Chin Chop and Terry McCune, I came down from Denver on the same day and by the same train with Howard Royland, knowing who he was, and also knowing his business full well. On the same train was this man, Ethan Fairday, and after we had taken the stage, at Wainwright, he gradually let out the fact that he was Don Danton, the detective."

"Naturally, I was surprised, and not a little interested; and when he had made known his business, I resolved to take a hand in it with him, for I knew well enough it could not be anything honest. I worked myself into his confidence and engaged with him, and allowed him to carry on the game he had begun. On the arrival of the stage my allies were naturally surprised, but they waited patiently until I had opportunity to talk with them and post them in the matter, and together we began to work out the case."

"Gathering all the facts, I immediately sent word to Denver and had the matter looked into there, and thus learned the whole truth. When I was in Denver to see these gentlemen, my name got mention in the papers. Mr. Job Letson saw it, and sent for me. I had gone, but this rogue, learning from a rascally employee what the nature of Mr. Letson's business was, went and represented himself as Don Danton, and so came into possession of the paper he had when he came here. Mr. Letson knew the rascally nature of his manager, Nathan, and wanted to put his property in safe hands."

"Armed with that paper, this fellow began at once one of the most daring and heartless pieces of villainy it has ever been my duty to unmask. Taking some men as vile as himself into the matter with him, they went to the private hospital where Letson was, representing themselves as his friends, and got permission to remove him, as he was then out of all danger. This they did, and made him their prisoner in a private house which they hired for the purpose. That done, a letter was written to Miss Letson over the forged names of the doctors of the institution, and Fairday came on here to carry out the scheme to the full. With the help of the

tase employee at the infirmary, who could intercept all letters, they considered themselves safe enough in their villainy."

"I am not prepared to say they meant to kill Mr. Letson. I do not think that was their intention, or they would not have gone to the trouble of making him their prisoner and caring for him at all. But they meant to hold him until such time as this rascal here had disposed of the mine and they had pocketed the money and taken themselves off."

"That was their intention, as I am well aware. But, their game has been blocked. With the aid of detectives at Denver I discovered Mr. Letson, and he has been brought here to face this crook. I see you are looking about for him, gentlemen. I will introduce him to you in one moment. Learning who the impostor really was, I sent for this woman, his wife, to come and identify him, having some time ago promised to communicate with her if I ever ran across him. You have heard what she had to say to him. It is a clear case."

Here Don paused, and the feeble old man with the white hair and beard stepped forward and removed his disguise.

It was Job Letson, still very weak, but out of all danger and on the road to a permanent recovery!

A rousing cheer greeted his appearance. It was, to all, like one returning from the dead.

"Yes," he said, pointing at the prisoner, "that is the man who represented himself to me as Don Danton, and whom I trusted as I would trust myself. My curse be upon him; detestable villain that he is!"

The crowd had increased all the time, rumor having gone out concerning what was going on, so the room was now packed full. Great was the cheering that followed, and a hundred voices welcomed Job Letson home.

"There is little more to tell," announced the real Don, when he could make himself heard again. "You can now understand clearly all that has been going on during the past few days. If I have allowed this rogue to play his assumed *role* so long, it was to gain time for this final unmasking. He was eager enough to expose the rascally work at the Wonder Mine, for he hoped by so doing to be able to sell the Sweetheart to these gentlemen, and so get hold of the money at an early date. It is needless for me to say Miss Letson would never have seen a penny of it, had he been able to carry out his infamous scheme."

"I allowed him to go on, and even aided him with now and then a word of modest advice, for he had not the ability himself to carry out the play he had undertaken. He had never a suspicion of my true character, of course."

"When he wrote to these gentlemen, bidding them come here, he thought he was doing a remarkably clever thing, little dreaming that he was playing into my hands. I had dispatched letters myself, explaining enough of the situation to bring the gentlemen here in response to his summons, and finally sent other communications by my allies. I had taken John Hinyon into my confidence, finally, and lastly Miss Letson herself, in order that she might not oppose the schemer's designs too strongly. Oh, it has been a great play, but the end has been reached."

"Little did my prisoner know of the character of the man whose name he so daringly assumed. He did not hesitate to drink, which Don Danton never does; nor was he sparing in his pompous self-praise. He made an ass of himself generally, or at any rate I had the pleasure of thinking so."

"And the paper he held? That is not in his possession now, nor has it been for some time. Perhaps you will remember the rough man who attacked him one night and deposited him on the floor. I will state, not to boast, but to make everything plain, that I was that man, and on that occasion I took the paper from him and put it in my pocket. As it was made out in my name, I considered that I was its rightful owner. Anyhow, I took possession of it as such, and he never knew what became of it, until now."

"Is there anything further to be explained? I think not. You who know all about the affair since my coming here, can readily make out the few points I have not touched upon. I have unmasked the impostor, and have made myself known to you as the genuine Don Danton. It is enough."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN CONCLUSION.

THE news had gone around the camp like wildfire, and in less than half an hour after the exposure the street in front of the hotel was black with people.

Never in all its history had Kickapoo seen an excitement like this. Everybody was wild, and perhaps if the crowd had had its own way there would have been some work for Judge Lynch.

Call after call was made for Don Danton, and nothing would satisfy the crowd until he made his appearance on the piazza and addressed the people.

The man who had come with Mr. Letson from Denver was another detective, whom Don introduced, and who told the particulars of that part of the work which had been performed by the Denver force.

There was a lawyer at Kickapoo, and he was called upon to arrange the paper which Helen Fairday required her rascally husband to sign. When it was prepared, the man gave his signature, and it was witnessed by several persons present, including Don Danton.

Fairday was a noted gambler and sharp. He had taken his wife's property from her and then deserted her, hoping to dispose of it and make use of the money. As he discovered, however, he could not dispose of it, nor could she make use of it so long as he withheld his signature from certain legal documents. Now it was fixed.

When the work was accomplished, the woman turned upon the prisoner and said:

"Now, Ethan Fairday, adieu forever. I loved you once, and would have been a life-long slave to you had you used me right, but all my love has turned to hatred now. I never want to look upon your face again."

Thanking Detective Danton, then, for the service he had rendered, she went out, and was seen no more.

The twenty thousand dollars, or most of it, which had been paid to Royland by Brett and Nathan, had been taken from the Sweetheart funds, as Don had discovered; and it was replaced.

Ethan Fairday was put in the local jail along with the other rascals, and the guard was redoubled so that there could be no chance for their escape. That having been done, the crowd next carried Job Nathan home to his overjoyed daughter.

The news of his return had reached her ears, so the shock was not what it might have been otherwise.

There was great rejoicing, as can well be imagined.

John Hinyon was recognized by Mr. Letson as manager of the mine, and Don, of course, resigned his office as superintendent.

Don and his allies were royally entertained, and the people of the camp could not do half enough to show their appreciation of what they had done toward righting the terrible wrong.

On the following morning a start was made for Denver with the prisoners.

Don and the other detective had them in charge, while Chin Chop and Terry acted as a sort of reserve guard.

The capitalists, too, returned, not caring to invest anything in the Wonder Mine, now that it had been exposed for what it really was. Nor did they ever return to look further.

Arriving at Denver, the prisoners were properly charged and imprisoned to await trial.

Other arrests had been made, and there was a goodly number of the rascals in limbo on account of the daring conspiracy.

When the cases came to trial, Ethan Fairday and those concerned with him in the attempt to get possession of the Sweetheart Mine were sent to prison for long terms, as they richly deserved.

Austin Brett, Woolfe Nathan, and those concerned with them in the attempted swindle of the Wonder Mine, were likewise severely dealt with, and sent to repent of their folly and crimes. Howard Royland was let off with a lighter sentence, but his life prospects were ruined.

How true it is that crime never pays. Dishonesty may flourish for a day, but in the end it is certain to prove a bad investment. Nothing pays, in the long run, like honesty and uprightness. A man may be poor, but if he be honest he has a priceless fortune which no one can take away from him. A good name is better than gold, and will carry its owner further than money in pocket.

Not long after the events recorded, there was a quiet wedding at Kickapoo, the happy couple being Lamia Letson and John Hinyon.

Delicate Don was present, as were his two able allies, and it was a joyous affair. The camp did full honor to the occasion, and everybody was happy.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,

98 William Street, New York.